Ultimately, the object of peer review is to improve oneself, an organisation or a workplace.

When I started out as a pharmacist hundreds of years ago, I was employed in a small pharmacy in rural Mpumalanga. Not because of the isolation, but rather because of lack of contact with my colleagues, I felt quite isolated. Apart from reading the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa (PSSA) journal and attending the odd PSSA meeting, I had no idea where I was in relation to the rest of my colleagues in the profession. Was I lagging behind? Did I practise outside my scope of practice? There was no doctor, vet nor dentist within a 60-km radius in the rural area in which I was living. Therefore, as a young pharmacist fresh out of university and having just completed my military training, I was asked to do things for which I was never trained! It was swim or sink, and I had to learn quickly. The luxury of being eased slowly into the profession with a proper peer review system did not exist. Although the experience was good for me, the alternative would have been ideal.

Thus, when I was elected as President of the PSSA, I made a conscious decision that I would evaluate our system, workings and decisions against peer groups as much as possible. The International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) is one such place where we can compare ourselves as pharmacists and organisations against the best, and worst, in the world. It feels as if I reported on the centennial FIP meeting last month, but it was as much as a year ago that the PSSA once again became a fully fledged member of FIP. This year, more than 30 pharmacists from South Africa attended. There were a number from academia, either delivering presentations or attending Council meetings, but they all made meaningful contributions to the international arena of pharmacy.

As recognition of his contribution, Andy Gray was inducted as a fellow of FIP. We wish to congratulate him for making us proud! Mariet Eksteen was elected Chair of the FIP Young Pharmacists Group. I am sure she is going to succeed in the international pharmacy arena. The FIP video on the everyday lives of pharmacists opened during the opening session with 3 000 delegates. The PSSA’s own Anri was in the opening scene. A number of presentations are planned for next year in Bangkok, Thailand. The Codeine Care project is one of them, as well as the Drug Wise project, initiated by the Pretoria branch of the community pharmacist sector of the PSSA.

While South Africa is learning and gaining from its association with FIP, the latter is also benefiting from the achievements of South African pharmacists! The theme of this year’s conference was: “Towards a future vision for complex patients”. We all know that no two patients are alike. Indeed, the complexities were highlighted from different perspectives, and the pharmacist’s role in addressing these complexities discussed. Many parallel sessions were held that would satisfy the interests of all pharmacists, whether or not academia, industry, hospital or community.

Ethics, as I have discussed in many of my previous columns, also featured highly on the FIP agenda, with an emphasis on globalism, ethics and regulation. This reflects the ethical dilemmas in which pharmacists often find themselves.

The clinical intervention of pharmacists as members of the healthcare profession is becoming more apparent each year as agenda items such as “anticoagulation therapy”, “translating laboratory results”, “diagnostics in individualised medicine” indicate. Considerable emphasis was placed on improving outcomes in patient care and the pharmacist’s role therein, as indicated by themes such as “best practice in integrating drug therapy”, “collaborative approaches” and “the need for better communication”.

The challenge for the PSSA and you, our members, is to translate this information into workable models for our South African situation. These models will not be possible if we do not compare ourselves to our peers and allow them to do the same. That is how we will improve the profession of pharmacy and the service that the PSSA delivers to its members. Many of these changes will not be visible immediately as a number of them imply a strategy that needs to be changed or implemented over time. Being peer reviewed conveys the sense that the profession is caring, caring about you as a fellow professional, and also about the future of the profession. Such a value is not often found in today’s world of dog eats dog. Let us appreciate this aspect of our profession and participate in the peer review of our colleagues, society and the profession of pharmacy.

Johann Kruger
President: PSSA