Pharmacy 2011 Conference

It’s gone. It’s over. All that work! The blood, sweat and copious tears! And now it’s as if it never happened. Or is it?

Of course not. It was certainly a great deal of work for many people. Naturally, there were glitches, but nothing that couldn’t be sorted out and nothing that was earth shattering. And the positive feedback that we’ve had has shown how much participants appreciated the conference. It certainly sounds as though there was a lot of enthusiasm to put into practice the things that had been discussed.

How does one measure the success of a conference? By the number of people who attend? The final tally, including exhibitors, was 513. That’s the most people who have ever attended our pharmacy conference. There were 116 people from other countries and 397 South Africans. Of these, 34 registered as day delegates. (That was rather disappointing – I would have thought that it was a wonderful opportunity for pharmacists in the area to experience at least one day of an international conference.)

It was great to have so many pharmacists under one roof! Do you know what the worst thing about that was? Most of the time I was working, so I couldn’t say hello to all my friends! You have no idea how I felt about that. There were people there, and I knew they were there, and I would have loved to have caught up with them, but I just couldn’t. Oh well. If you were there and I didn’t say hello, I do apologise. And we’ll make up for it next year.

Do you know what the best thing about conference was? The AGMs were kept to a minimum and the rest of the time was devoted to topics that are of importance to pharmacy. The programme gave so many choices that it was difficult, if not impossible, for pharmacists to choose which session to attend. This happened because there were three parallel sessions (with more than 40 speakers, both local and international) to choose from. There were also a number of discussions and even a couple of debates. Every topic was carefully chosen to be relevant to pharmacy, and my personal opinion is that the speakers were great.

I am involved, therefore I am!

I read Johann Kruger’s article with great interest, and I identified with every word of it. It’s hard to have a social (or in this case a pharmacy) conscience. I know that getting involved is not an option for everyone. There are personal and family commitments that make it very difficult. Whatever we do in our personal lives, though, there are so many things that apply to all of us in our professional lives. And sometimes, one person’s personal experience or wisdom can make a tremendous difference to decisions that may affect the entire profession. So, I agree with Johann. It’s so important that PSSA members become involved with PSSA matters, and take up leadership roles.

For myself, I was able to get involved in the PSSA very soon after qualifying, and I know that it changed my professional life. I experienced a great deal of professional and personal growth that would not have been possible had I cocooned myself in my home or job. I have absolutely no regrets about having been involved, first as a member and nowadays as an employee. I also have no regrets about being involved with Pharmacy Council, and for the same reasons – it has enriched my understanding of our world and it has made it possible for me to contribute, albeit in a small way, to the continued development of the profession.

One thing that really resonated with me was when he wrote about the difficult decisions that must be made. An elected official, whether of the PSSA or the Council or any other organisation, is often told that they owe it to their “constituencies” to influence decisions that are made. It’s sometimes hard to define what is meant by a “constituency” – people who vote for a particular person may come from diametrically opposed points of view. Which is more important?

What I’ve experienced is that there are times when you have no choice – you need to rely on your own judgment and perhaps give a split second decision. And you know that your decision will please some people and anger others. I do like to think, however, that people are not elected just to be puppets. I hope they are elected because the voters have faith in their experience, judgement and commitment to the profession. That’s what it’s all about!

So I’m sure you join me in wishing the newly elected National Executive Committees of PSSA and CPS the best of luck for the next year. We expect a lot of them, so we need to give them all the support they need.

Lorraine Osman