From caterpillar to butterfly: Conference 2012

As I come to the end of my three-year stint as the President of the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa, I look back and count my many blessings for the privilege afforded me to lead such an organisation. I give thanks to God for blessing me with the privilege of being of service to my fellow colleagues. By the time you read this, we will have met at Emperor’s Place, Kempton Park, to deliberate the metamorphosis of our profession. Hopefully, we will turn out to be an extraordinarily beautiful butterfly. With the dedication and hard work of so many of you and the enthusiasm of young pharmacists and students, I have no doubt that we will turn into a beautiful butterfly: the end of the beginning of a new life for pharmacy.

Guiding principles

During my term of office, the preamble to our constitution was central to my leadership. Every time I read it, I appreciate where we are coming from and what we endeavour to transmute into. The goals that we strive to achieve are espoused in our 2009 strategic plan, together with the preamble.

For reference, I list them here:

• To be the first-line resource centre.
• To promote unity of purpose.
• To be the trusted voice.
• To build bridges.
• To be above reproach.
• To ensure a sufficient pharmacy workforce.

Many members have worked hard towards achieving some of these goals, and for that, I salute them. However, some branches and sectors have faced major internal challenges. It really saddens me to quote a very distraught member: “Honestly, Madam President, Mrs Osman, building bridges with the PSSA *** branch has become a mountain to climb for an elephant like me”. What is even more unfortunate about this statement is that it was made by a young colleague who is at the dawn of her pharmacy career. This is a branch sector leader who feels unwelcome within the mother body.

Colleagues, we are one body and this whole body (the Society) is aching because a part of it is unwell. However, being an eternal optimist, I believe that we can turn things around and become a beautiful butterfly. We just have to learn from our country which showed us that a new world was possible when many sceptics expected a blood bath. I just pray that sufficient bridges can and will be built to ensure the sustainability of our Society and the service to our members. I hope that the Society will continue to grow from strength to strength. As we say in Zulu, Akulahlwa mbeleko ngakufelwa, which loosely translates to: “You do not throw away the baby carrier just because your baby has died”. (You keep it because you will have another chance to have another baby. This is assuming that you are still fertile enough to do so!) In other words, although this unfortunate situation occurred in this one branch, we should not lose hope as we can still develop stronger intra- and inter-relationships within the Society and with other stakeholders.

As Lorraine puts it, often we have felt under siege and have fought battles. We have won some and lost others. Without sounding negative, I dare say that: C’est la vie. Life continuously throws many curved balls or disguised opportunities at us of varying magnitude and complication. Ours is just to manage them as we move on. I pray that we continue to have the strength to do so, and to serve the people of South Africa through what at times may seem to be insurmountable obstacles.

Thank you

I am aware that, while leading this organisation, it has not been possible to attend to everyone’s individual needs. For this, I am truly sorry. I wish to thank all those who have worked with me in various capacities, including members of the national executive, staff members at national and regional offices, and all of you who have been there for me. I have relied on many of you, both young and not so young. Thank you to spouses who have allowed many of you, especially those in leadership, to sacrifice family time to attend to the Society’s business.

Wishing you all the best in your careers and personal lives.

Masibambane forever!

PS. I have often wondered if people read this column as I rarely receive any comments about what I have written. Last month, I received a comment from an unexpected source, from a father of one of my colleagues! He told me that he reads “Masibambane” every month. When I advised him that I have one last column to write, without hesitation he stated: “I am looking forward to reading that one also”. He made the pressure (exerted by Lorraine and her colleague, Nitsa, when they have to meet their publishing deadlines) worthwhile! Thank you to those who share our journal with others outside our profession as this further informs the public about us and pharmacy.