I have a confession to make. During the time that I worked at the University of the Witwatersrand, I always felt as though I was a pseudo-academic.

When I left school, my parents wanted me to become a teacher. As a 17 year old, I rebelled. The last thing on earth I wanted to do was to become a teacher. And deal with rebellious teenagers? Absolutely not! So I went straight into medical technology, and found that I loved medical microbiology. Bugs were much more interesting to me than kids.

However, eventually I needed a new career, and decided that pharmacy was an excellent option. It was. I fell in love with organic chemistry on the first day that I attended class. It took a bit longer with the other courses, but I knew that I was in the right place at the right time for me.

What does this have to do with being a pseudo-academic? During my internship, a vacancy arose at the Technikon Witwatersrand for a microbiology lecturer, and it was logical to drift in that direction. I found that I thoroughly enjoyed it. Young people who have chosen a career path were much more interesting to me than children who were at school because they had no choice, and the subjects were infinitely more captivating than school subjects. Perhaps my parents were right. Teaching could be satisfying. So I stayed. But I didn't ever become a "true" academic. In those days, if you weren't shackled to your laboratory, you didn't fit the mould. We moved to University of the Witwatersrand, and more than ever, research was the raison d'être. So I couldn't claim to be an academic because my interests were exploring existing practices, rather than blazing new trails.

My second confession is that I haven't missed academia since leaving Wits. Yes, I still love young pharmacists and I still enjoy interacting with them. I also still enjoy being involved as an external examiner to a couple of universities. And while I was on Pharmacy Council, I couldn't tear myself away from the Education Committee. But there are many things that I don't miss, especially the paperwork!

And today, reading the Cum Laude page, I realise that perhaps, just maybe, I was in danger of being a closet academic. While research remains pivotal to academia, the importance of teaching has been recognised and is actively encouraged.

Why did I react strongly to the Cum Laude page? I think that it's because one of my pet annoyances over the years has been, and still is, the way in which many pharmacists ignorantly generalise about the content of curricula. We sometimes get stuck in a time warp: "This is what I learned as an undergraduate, and therefore this must be what they learn nowadays". No dear, practices change, and so do curricula. Obviously, there are always, and always will be, things that could or should be learned as a student that are not covered. But that is the place for internship, surely? Not just to put theory into practice, but to fill in the particular gaps that are needed in that specific practice setting.

The very first paragraph of the Cum Laude page reminded me that the normal lifespan of a qualification listed with the South African qualifications authority is three years. The intention is exactly what we spoke about. The curriculum must reflect the body of knowledge and skills that entry-level generalist pharmacists need. It's not a simple matter of "This is needed. Teach it". Every inclusion should mean an exclusion as well. What is no longer relevant? Imagine how the students and their parents would complain if more and more was added to their load, without removing an equivalent amount. As much as we'd like to equip graduates for any eventuality, it's impossible to do so.

When the curriculum changes, the entire educational institution must review its teaching and learning programme. In some cases, minor tweaks may satisfy the new requirements. In others, a complete overhaul is needed. Luckily, there are people who make sure that it happens. It isn't your problem or mine. Our problem is to guide the new pharmacists and help them to discover for themselves what new skills and knowledge they need in addition to what they learned at university. And the most important thing that we need to do for them is to help them to discover the potential within them. After four years of study, they are now graduates. Our role is to help them to make the transition into pharmacists.

On a lighter note

I have to share with you some of the recent offerings from dictionary.com. I love receiving their Word of the Day because I know that there are going to be words which I've never encountered before.

My favourites from the last couple of weeks include:

- **Ailurophilia**: A liking of cats, as in cat fanciers. (I need this one)
- **Blatherskite**: A person given to voluble, empty talk. (I know some of those)
- **Galligaskins**: Leggings or gaiters, usually made of leather. (I don't think I can use this word)
- **Williwaw**: A violent squall that blows in near-polar latitudes, as in the Strait of Magellan. (Hopefully, I won't encounter one)
- **Misology**: A distrust or hatred of reason or reasoning. (I think that's my cue to stop right now. I swear it applies to far too many people!)

Have a good month!

Lorraine Osman