Thanks, Charlie

Thanks, Charlie Cawood, for posting the above poem to Facebook. It’s affected me personally and profoundly. I wish I’d written it but I suspect I’m too stubborn – if I stand alone or apart, I guess it’s because I’m stubborn, not strong. But I am totally convinced of the wisdom of standing together when it’s important. And it’s important now, more than ever.

HMI

I will write more on the market inquiry as it unfolds, but I need to share an impression with you on the eve of the first set of public hearings. The Chief Justice has stressed the need for evidence. This is seriously important, obviously, and many stakeholders have submitted their views. Obviously sensitive financial information cannot be disclosed to competitors, but 66 public submissions are available on www.healthinquiry.net. The evidence leaders are in the process of scrutinising the submissions and extracting relevant facts, which must be backed up by evidence.

There are to be six sets of public hearings. At five of these, specific areas of interest will be under the spotlight – availability of information about health care, competitive dynamics of the private health care sector as a whole, competitive dynamics among funders, competitive dynamics among service providers and the regulatory framework. These will look in depth at the factors identified by evidence leaders, and the technicalities of each will be examined.

The first set of hearings is different. This is a series of general hearings, where the private health care environment and the interactions of role players will be explored in order to give both the HMI and the public a better understanding of how stakeholders interact and what their experiences have been. The media have obviously been invited to attend, and the HMI will post audio clips and transcripts on the website.

I came away from the pre-hearing consultation with the impression that in this first hearing, in effect we will need to speak directly to the consumers of our services. The PSSA has been allocated an hour to present a broad overview of the factors that affect competition (or the lack of it) in the pharmacy private sector environment. It seems like a tall order, but we’ll obviously try our best to do so. I’ll report back to you later!

Do you know where you’re going to?

We started with a poem, and we’ll end with an extract of the lyrics to the theme from Mahogany. They apply to you and me, as pharmacists and as people.

Do you know where you’re going to?
Do you like the things that life is showing you?
Where are you going to?
Do you know?

Lorraine Osman

Be strong enough to stand alone, be yourself enough to stand apart, be wise enough to stand together when the time comes

Author unknown

They were wise enough to stand together. Can we say that about pharmacists? I’m not convinced that we can. It’s so easy to be caught up in our own angst, that when the crunch comes it’s time for us to be united, our personal circumstances take over and we really cannot see the wood for the trees.

Take NHI, for example. So many pharmacists lament that no-one is giving them an opportunity to get involved. Others carry on blissfully imagining that nothing will change in their world. Some are adamant that they will not provide services unless they are paid exactly what they want. The reality is that healthcare will never be the same again, not in the private sector and not in the public sector.

The NHI White Paper has eventually been published for comment. (I’m glad I didn’t hold my breath after the Green Paper was published.) Have you read it? What are your comments? Please let me know.

At the same time, the public hearings for the Private Healthcare Market Inquiry are about to kick off in a few days from now. It’s been a fascinating process and I am totally in awe of former Chief Justice Sandile Ngcobo and his team, including the panel, the evidence leaders and the technical team. They are efficient and effective.

I mention this now because I was at a media briefing where a journalist asked an important question – is the Inquiry relevant in view of the White Paper? No-one really answered the question. I guess the answer is the same as to the question “How long is a piece of string?”

Back to my original question, are pharmacists wise enough to stand together? And has the time come for them to do so, or has it passed? Funnily enough, I’m always aware of it when our office prepares comment on draft legislation. The PSSA represents pharmacists in a wide variety of pharmaceutical sectors. Can we speak with one voice, for example, if community pharmacists face different challenges from pharmacists in industry? Are hospital pharmacists poles apart in the private and public sectors?

When we comment on draft legislation, we need to balance our input and accurately reflect the potential effects on all areas of pharmacy. Sometimes, it’s easy, sometimes it’s not. The difference depends entirely on the feedback we have received from you. Yes, YOU. Obviously between us, the national executive committee and the office have a wide range of varied experiences in pharmacy. Obviously, we can put together comment. But it’s so much more relevant when we know from you what your experiences are, and how you face the daily challenges that you encounter. So please don’t be shy. Interact with your PSSA or SAACP or SAAHIP branch. Write to us. Write to me if you like. You know me. You know I’m interested in what you have to say. So don’t be a stranger. We can’t stand together unless we all come to the party.