Most pharmacists will from time to time do locum work. Sometimes the drive will be the extra income generated, but at times it is simply done as a favour to a colleague, to allow them to take a break or to attend a wedding.

Whatever the circumstances, most of us are aware of how hard it has become for a pharmacist in a rural setting to find a locum and how prohibitively expensive the luxury of having a locum has become.

For the locum (even when playing the part of a Good Samaritan) it has become a road fraught with dangers! I am aware of a retired pharmacist who, whilst standing in for a friend, did not pick up a dispensing error made by one of the support personnel. Fortunately the patient suffered no permanent damage and the case was put to rest. Or was it?

I need to interrupt my story…. If it were you, would you report this incident to your personal indemnity insurer?

Back to my story… Lo and behold! A couple of months later, after the patient has relocated to stay with his children overseas, the pharmacist receives a legal claim from the patient, for possible future loss, due to the dispensing error! And now the claim is made in the currency of the patient’s new country of residence!

This takes me back to the interruption: If he did not report the incident to his personal indemnity insurer, he could not claim legal support or indemnity insurance!! How many pensioners can afford to pay for litigation and then pay the penalty (in this case close to a million rand) out of his own pocket, without facing financial ruin?

As a matter of interest: If you have indemnity cover at the time of the incident and the incident is reported, your insurer is obliged to support you should a claim be made regarding the specific incident, at a later stage, even if you are no longer insured.

Another issue that becomes common practice is that when I do a locum at a pharmacy, I am required to sign a binding contract. Fair, is it not? But then the contract stipulates that I agree, for the time I am in their employ, to take over all the duties and responsibilities of the responsible pharmacist! Do you still consider it fair?

It implies that you must even take responsibility for the infrastructure shortcomings and for any equipment failure (such as cold-chain equipment). Should the SAPC inspector pitch up while you are doing the locum, will the employer try to hold you responsible for SOPs not being updated or in place? And with regards to registration of staff, you could be held responsible for any staff member who failed to renew their registration with SAPC. And let us rather not start on your responsibility with regards to National Core Standards compliance!

Unfortunately I do not have a short answer to all the issues raised, but we do have excellent support from the PSSA in this regard! If you thought that you do not get sufficient value for your PSSA membership fees, then just maybe, you should start using the service on offer! For free to members!