Passion, Purpose and Integrity

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Attending and participating in the Border and Eastern Districts regional conference with the theme “Recreating passion for our profession” has reaffirmed my conviction of the critical role of pharmacists in the healthcare team as well as the passion and purpose of our people to deliver on this mandate.

I would like to start this piece with my conclusion: We have the passion, we know our purpose, and by recognising and using the opportunity now, we can make the difference. We as pharmacists have the knowledge, exceptional understanding and judgement to make the right decisions and take the necessary action. Only by utilising this wisdom of the pharmacist can we ensure comprehensive pharmaceutical care for all through ethical action.

It has been said many times that all great achievements start with the passion to do something special, to make a difference. Passion is the great motivator and it could be founded in spiritual, artistic, political, economic, social, or personal aspirations. Passion can ignite a fire, but it is purpose that provides the fuel to keep it burning – passion leads to ideas but purpose defines it. Feelings drive passion while purpose provides the reason for doing and ultimately, for being.

We have one life in which we have to make a difference and we do many things in the time allocated to us, some important and others not. It is however the important ones that adds meaning, that distinguishes between making a living and building a life. That is why we often see questions like “What is my life’s purpose?” or “What can I do with my time that is important?” We all have gifts and talents, but have to find the purpose to use these to make a difference, and to have a significant life. In past generations people might have been satisfied looking for significance at the end of a career, but more and more the current generation want to see significance right from the start, knowing that what they do will make an immediate difference. Therefore then the key question according to Mark Zuckerberg, ‘Am I doing the most important thing I could be doing?’

Finding your passion and purpose is however not a passive process, you have to make a conscious decision and take action. Taking this action could require sacrifice or will include some sort of cost as nothing is gratifying all of the time. Complacency might be the biggest initial hurdle to overcome while the current paradigm and initial failures could prove to be barriers along the way. What has been overcome is what makes it significant. When your passion is then in what you do and you understand and work towards your purpose, you will be accountable and committed to both yourself and the people you serve.

Recent studies have also shown a link between passion and professional burnout and points to obsessive passion as cause of conflict and thus contributing to burnout. On the other hand, shared passion and purpose would increase work satisfaction and decrease conflict, and thus professional burnout. Our success will be dependent on the shared purpose of our community of pharmacists and it will not only be about what we do, but also how and why we do it. Defining these, especially the ‘why’, then effectively communicating it and maintaining the collective passion and purpose will determine the long term role and success of the profession.

Maybe what Mark Zuckerberg wrote with regards to Facebook can then be adapted to apply for pharmacy, “we don’t build provide services to make money; we make money to build provide better services (and better healthcare).”