



Joining the 20th (21st?) century

Dear Lorraine

Sharing with you the story I experienced decades ago, it sounds like I also now qualify as an “old” pharmacist! (*You do, Johan, you do. Ed.*)

Upon completion of my pharmacy studies, I started working in pharmacies where each pharmacist had a “pulpit-like” workstation with rolls of pre-printed labels in front of them. No such a thing as on-line submission and responses then – early 90’s.

For capsules and tablets you then used the yellow labels, for syrups we used the blue labels and they were pre-printed as “Take _____ medicine measures (_____ ml) _____ times a day” etc.

I was part of the massive project when the “pulpits” were replaced with PCs. And that is where the fun started.

For many of my elder colleagues (then – I was the youngster) these computers were absolutely the last straw and almost “evil”. They were afraid of touching them and very, very reluctant working on them – for years we were used to hand-written labels – and they worked, so why the change?

How the hell do you now expect someone to key in medicine items and voila! Labels appear from the printer.....

Training, coaching, repeat training, and almost “take-me-by-the-hand” situations kept me occupied for many months, and sometimes tested my limited patience beyond extreme.

After spending hours at one pharmacy showing them how to operate the dispensing programme, with my hand on top of their hand to maneuver the mouse (another strange element), I left them to fly solo.

The instructions to dispense Stopayne tablets were:

Type in S T O P – on the screen appeared all the various Stopayne products – magic!

Select the one you need – meaning TABLETS or CAPSULES or SYRUP – all still fine.

Then the question...

“What should I press for selecting the SYRUP? I pressed TAB on the keyboard for TABLETS and CAPS LOCK for CAPSULES – there is no “button” for syrup...”

After bursting out in laughter, and humming “Kumbaya my lord”, I suggested the next training module should include Voltaren suppositories – at least we can use the “up arrow” key, and perhaps laxative we can modify the ESC button... Dormicum will be SHUT DOWN function and Prozac to CTRL life...

More than 20 years later, I am grateful that all the pharmacists I know are now fully computer literate!

Yours in pharmacy

Johan Viljoen

