



A Piece of my Mind

Editorial Comment

So have you voted yet??

By the time you read this, you will have received your ballot papers from Pharmacy Council, together with a booklet containing names, photographs and biosketches of those pharmacists who have been brave enough to agree to be nominated for the Council elections.

Have you voted yet? I hope so. I hope that the percentage poll will be high this year. It's embarrassing to have a low percentage. It might indicate a silent protest, but it may also indicate lethargy, disinterest and laziness. What pharmacy needs is vibrant, passionate and active pharmacists who will do even the small positive things that could benefit the profession, themselves and their patients.

So please, as a personal favour, read the biosketches and decide, in your own opinion, which of the nominees have shown that they are committed to improving pharmacy. Which ones have experience that could be beneficial to Council? If you were the only person to determine the membership of Council, who would you choose?

And then, as a further personal favour (to yourself, not me), please vote. Your vote is needed and appreciated.

What happens when someone is elected?

Why do I say that the candidates are brave? Because if elected (or appointed), they will find (a) that it's a lot of work and (b) suddenly people will have unrealistic expectations of them.

Yes, it is a lot of work, and I'm not talking about the days you need to take off work to attend meetings. It's actually the work that goes into preparing for meetings that takes the most time. Council members are provided with documentation for committee and Council meetings. This needs to be read, understood and form the basis for any points that the member wishes to raise during the meeting. If it's done thoroughly, you need to do a lot of reading before every meeting – a single Council meeting document, with agenda, minutes and documents that form the background to the discussions, can be thousands of pages. Oh well. I admit that's an exaggeration, but it does feel as though it's thousands of pages. Realistically, it can only be hundreds of pages.

The unrealistic expectations are generally from people who don't understand how Council works. As you know, I personally operate on a principle of instant gratification – if I want something, or I want something to change, I want it to happen NOW! I quickly learned that Council can't work like that. The topics that are discussed are of

national importance, not just my personal immediate priority. Because of that, there are processes to go through, including consultation processes when something must be changed.

The ultimate test of proposed changes is whether or not it is in the public's interest. And once the decision is made, there are many occasions on which it cannot automatically be implemented immediately. If a change in the Pharmacy Act or a Regulation is needed, I have seen that it can take years, because it must go through the appropriate channels, first the consultation phase then via a number of departments within the National Department of Health before it can be presented in an acceptable format for the Minister to consider and then, hopefully, if it is appropriate in terms of current national policies, publish.

The other unrealistic expectation is that you can champion the cause of any interest group. That doesn't work. Yes, of course you may present logical arguments around any given matter, but if it does not convince the other 24 members, or at least a significant number of them, your suggestion will not be accepted.

Does that mean that pharmacists should not allow themselves to be nominated for Council?

Not at all. I can state categorically that it was an amazing period of growth for me. I learned how to look outside my immediate environment and it made a huge difference to my understanding of the potential for pharmacists. Until then, I had tended to look only at the limitations placed on pharmacists. But when I started by looking at patients' needs and working back through the healthcare system to pharmacists, I saw their value and latent strengths. Now, how do we convert that latent strength to open and obvious activity?

Fond farewells?

You will notice, when you read *PSSA Perspectives*, that I will be leaving the PSSA 23 years and one month after I joined it. It's the right time. Life changes constantly, our experiences mould us, accidents happen, priorities change, and inevitably, we get older. So it's my turn to make necessary changes in my life. I'm not saying goodbye to you, though. Not yet. And it doesn't mean that I'm deserting you. I'll still be around for a while, in one way or another, and I'll remain with the *SAPJ* until it is the right time for me to leave you. In the meantime, I intend to continue to enjoy it thoroughly.

Lorraine Osman