PIECE OF MY MIND

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Academy Conference
It’s always good to go to an Academy Conference. It reminds me of the quips about loving work and being able to watch it for hours. I’m not going to be doing research and other intellectual things, but I’m glad there are other people who are involved in it. (And I presume that you read Cum Laude last month and that you were as impressed as I was that 97 Masters and 18 Doctoral degrees conferred in the past two years. Someone’s working hard.) It makes me feel secure in the knowledge that someone is making sure that our medicines are safe and that the quality of our practices is beyond reproach.

Or does it? One of the presentations that made me think was given by a young researcher from the University of the Western Cape. Naushaad Ebrahim presented his findings on the pharmacoeconomic impact of non-adherence to standard treatment guidelines in the management of asthma.

Quite apart from the emergencies that arise because of inadequate therapy, it worried me that only 46% of prescribing in certain community health clinics was according to the standard treatment guidelines for asthma. So what? There’s more than one way to skin a cat (never did understand that one) so there’s also more than one way to treat a condition. If it works, why question it? After all, the three rules to live by. They are:

1. Communication
2. Communication
3. Communication

Rings true to me.

Kevin also shared with us the criteria for a good conference. He said that a good conference is defined by making three new friends, hearing two good jokes and learning one new fact. In that case, this was a superlatively good conference!

All in the family
Academy conference always makes me feel a twinge of regret. Did I do the right thing in leaving academia? I know we have no choice but to go where life takes us, but it’s hard to sever ties, and it’s a relief to know that we don’t have to. This was reinforced when I returned home and read the letter from Leila Dockrat (see page 60).

The relationship between lecturers and students is so similar to that between a parent and child. You nurture, you guide, you hope you’re giving your child the type of grounding that will enable them to stand alone in a difficult world. You hope you’re not damaging the child or the student but both sides are learning so they make mistakes along the way, and you and the child or student hurt each other. It’s probably true that no pain means no gain – you usually grow only when you deal with the consequences of the pain.

Your children may leave home, but they never ever leave your heart. And it’s the same with students. The lecturer and the student probably have a sigh of relief when they part ways after graduation. Their paths separate, and they may never meet again, but somehow the bond remains and over time, hopefully the hurts dissolve and you’re left with affection and a recognition that, as survivors of the same experience, the relationship hasn’t ended.

So, Leila, have I forgiven my students? I hope they’ve forgiven me.

Lorraine Osman