



# Where to from here?

**Nhlanhla G Mafarafara**

President, SAAHIP

“A dream is not a dream unless dreamed by the entire village.” This is the reflection of a 12-year-old Japanese girl after her family lost all they had after the 1945 fire-bombing. This left her family devastated, homeless, and begging for food while pushing the little belongings they had on a wheelbarrow. She and her mother began “dreaming” together of a new “reality.” She went on to form new connections and new friends and attracted recognition for her activist role.

I invite you today, as a hospital pharmacist, to dream with us. Following the FIP World Congress held from 1-4 September 2024 in Cape Town, South Africa is left with a high-level call to action that can only be fulfilled by a national dream towards realising quality, accessible, patient-centred pharmaceutical services for all. My first call of action for all of you is “Where are you in relation to current practice, norms of standards, and innovations?”

## Reflections from FIP

There are five things I would like us to reflect on in the context of South Africa.

## FIP’s Priority Actions

The FIP has identified 12 priority work programmes that are to be carried out throughout the international pharmacy community (see Figure 1). These priority programmes are relevant to South Africa. As a nation, association, and institutions in different locations, identifying with these means we are proactively engaging in finding relevant solutions from a universal perspective and applying them in our unique situations. The aim is to achieve equitable health, which requires that there be consensus from governors, researchers, policymakers, pharmaceutical educators, statutory councils, practice managers, and practitioners. South Africa is a fertile ground that is seen with forward-thinking solutions that are already in place, although at times applied on one side of the sector.

## Achieving equitable access to healthcare in South Africa

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us three things: the need to improve access to vaccines for the African continent, efficiency in the medicines and vaccines supply chain, and access to financing for health. Over the past five years, South Africa has experienced budget cuts and a shortage of human resources for health, which is a hard blow for pharmacy as well as increasing inequality. Learning from this experience as well as other factors, the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, in his address to the congress, raised five critical issues that must be considered to deal with to improve healthcare:



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- A. Addressing health inequalities across the world. Some countries have cutting-edge innovations and advanced systems, while other countries grapple to provide basic healthcare services.
- B. The urgency of transforming health. This includes strengthening the supply chain, improving health infrastructure, and addressing human resource constraints. The conceptual framework ought to be redesigned and realigned to current and future needs.
- C. Embracing innovations and technology to transform service delivery processes and improve efficiency and decision-making and tackling antimicrobial resistance, medicine shortage, and substandard medicines.
- D. Investing in sustainable and equitable financing for health to protect human rights.
- E. Making advancements in the commitment to public health.

These actionable steps cannot happen with pharmacists standing by the fence spectating in the gallery of decision-making. Pharmacists are



**Figure 1:** FIP Priority Work program. Presented by the FIP President, Paul Sinclair during the FIP World Congress held in Cape Town from 1-4 September 2024

key stakeholders and drivers of change. In the space of pharmaceutical service delivery, these five considerations should be discussed across all levels in such a way that each of us finds a unique space for contribution within the value chain.

### Transformation in the role of pharmacists

South Africa has a vision to have long and healthy lives for all. According to Statistics South Africa, the life expectancy is 63.6 years for males and 69.2 years for females. The infant mortality rate is 22.9/1 000 live births. The HIV prevalence is estimated to be approximately 12.7% with over 8 million South Africans living with HIV.

This is but to paint a picture of public health challenges with economic impact. Other problems such as antimicrobial resistance, non-communicable diseases, and vaccine-preventable diseases need to be brought under control. Pharmacists also play a critical role in dealing with pandemics and outbreaks. We also have an opportunity to participate in addressing climate change and global warming. The impact of pharmaceuticals (manufacturing, packaging, and waste disposal) is among the areas in which pharmacists can actively engage policymakers as a contribution to a safe planet.

The future of pharmacists is continuously improving as the roles evolve and expand. During the FIP, other areas where pharmacists should lead or are leading are self-care, family planning, disease prevention, wellness programs including holistic health, health promotion and education, quality assurance, chronic disease management, pharmacovigilance and causality assessments post adverse drug reactions (ADRs), medication adherence, antimicrobial stewardship, clinical pharmacy services, medication use reviews, disaster management and more. The space is limitless.

How far have you applied yourself as a pharmacist? In her address to the congress, the Executive Director of the PSSA, Refiloe Mogale, invited pharmacists to, among other things, optimise medicine use, collaborate with other healthcare providers, advocate for the expansion of the role of pharmacists, support research and adoption of innovative technologies, educate the public about the role of pharmacists and the benefits they offer and ensuring efficient procurement and distribution. In her words, she said, "When you put a

pharmacist in a room, they will change the setup of that room".

As hospital pharmacists, we have been provided a great tool in the Basel Statements to think broadly about how to improve the role of pharmacists in hospitals. The tool covers a wide range of services and areas to work, advocate, research, and teach. Find your special corner and make it bright.

### Achieving Universal Health Coverage

The goal of achieving universal health coverage is possible. It will, however, require that collectively, we must see the whole picture of health, address health technologies, develop a robust primary health care (PHC) centred approach, "look closely at how we work together to serve the patient and ensure continuity in planning", (Dr Nicholas Crisp) and make advancement in Artificial Intelligence (AI). When considering AI as a tool to integrate into evidence-based medicines, pharmacists should also strive to address the ethical challenges that come with it as well as the future impact in advanced practice and efficiency in delivering care. This should be the starting point.

### Where to from here?

We should all endeavour to find an answer to this question. My invitation to you is threefold: Participate, Collaborate, and Innovate.

- Participate in all the dialogues and conversations that affect and influence pharmacy. There must be no conversation about pharmacy or medicines where a pharmacist is not involved. Not just as participants, but as drivers of change.
- Advancement in pharmaceutical care cannot be achieved by working in silos. We should all strive to join forces with other healthcare professionals to build bigger and more scalable solutions for pharmacies in South Africa. The days of representing pharmacy in isolation have led us to a weakened front. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.
- What was, what is and what will be is a result of men and women seeking better ways of doing things. There will always be a better way to do what we are doing. Such ways must be sought, pursued, studied, and implemented. We should not defend discomfort. Our pursuit is that of a better world, better healthcare, and better pharmaceutical services, together.