



Ready or not...Change is happening

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Change is a continuous phenomenon which must be properly managed to ensure success at all times. If not anticipated nor handled with care, it can leave both individuals and institutions confounded.¹ Change management is the ability to constantly review and renew the organisation's outlook, functional structures and performance capabilities, to achieve the fast-changing demands that emerge from both internal and external stakeholders of the organisation.² It is crucial for healthcare workers to develop the ability to manage change (both individually and organisationally) in order to thrive in a fast-changing health care environment. In order to successfully manage and accept the complexity of change, there should be a conducive environment for ongoing open learning by ensuring that there are tools and systems for change readiness and to facilitate a step-by-step approach to change management.³



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Since change is a constant, not embracing change is denial of its inevitability which ultimately leads to failure to implement or deal with it more effectively. Good ideas and initiatives could fail to achieve their intended outcomes when approached reactively or in ways that suggests inconsistent sharpening of systems for such. South Africa and the global health community is experiencing changes that require reorganisation of ideas and approaches. Changes such as digital health innovation, universal health coverage and professional scope evolution. For example, one needs to believe and embrace that digital technology is not here to take away jobs, but to enhance performance, thus professionals with digital skills will be more market attractive than those without. The role of pharmacists has now shifted to prescribing and co-prescribing for improved access to care and better patient outcomes. It's a matter of mental orientation around the change that is now here.

Change in and by itself is never a problem, it is an opportunity. The real challenge is people's ability to reorganise themselves for the need for change and developing practical strategies to respond to, initiate and implement change. According to Self & Schraeder (2009), there are three factors to this effect:⁴

- Personal factors: concerns about change and the qualities which lead to change aversion. Some of these makes one to feel less equipped for the change, and thus making it less attractive.

- Organisational factors: previous experience of similar changes or credibility of the organisation in handling change could make people sceptical about it.
- Change specific factors: the change process or what the change brings to the environment can prevent the actual change, delay it or alter it negatively.

To deal with change and avoid both personal and organisational shock when it finally happens, there are a few things I want to suggest:^{5,6}

- People involvement. Involve the people who will be affected by change ahead of time before it happens. And as individuals, develop a keen sense of optimism and desire or willingness to be involved in the changes that affect you by acquiring the knowledge required for the post change environment and/or get involved in leading it.
- Plan for change. There should be systems, plans, pathways, and tools properly aligned for all the phases of change. Change should be dealt with using project management principles. It should have scope, clear objectives, time frames and resources aligned with it.
- Managing the people. Every step of change should be clearly communicated. People should always know what will and will not change and allow them to engage, grieve or disengage with the process. Engaging people allows the organisation to reduce or prevent unnecessary pressure on people and the systems involved.
- Evaluate change. Constantly monitor the progress, the impact and the outcomes and provide feedback to all stakeholders involved or affected.

What does this mean for pharmacists

It is important for pharmacists to position themselves for new paradigms. Academic institutions should also infuse new graduates with fluid skills for pharmacists on the subject of change (initiation and embracing it). Abednico Makina once said "*human beings are created with capacity to create circumstances favourable for his/her living conditions. If you wait for circumstances to be created for you, you will always be forced to adapt to what life throws at you.*" What the world is, it's not what it was, and what it will be is not what it is. Pharmacists need to position themselves as strategic contributors in the global decision making, pharmacy programs design gallery and systems innovation for better pharmacy practice. It will also require strategic collaborations, commitments and advocacy locally, regionally and globally as well rapid adaptation and evolution in thinking, research, policy and boardroom engagements for practice innovation. But more so, it requires acceptance that nothing stays the same.

References

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