



Editorial

As we publish this special conference issue of the South African Pharmaceutical Journal, coinciding with the South African Association of Hospital and Institutional Pharmacists' (SAAHIP) 37th Annual Conference, it is difficult to not reflect on the transformative landscape of pharmacy in South Africa. This conference theme, "Future Ready 5.0", challenges pharmacists to adapt to technological advancements while maintaining the human touch in pharmaceutical care. Pharmaceutical care is by definition a *patient-centred practice*, where pharmacists assume *responsibility for a patient's medication-related needs*, ensuring that drug therapy is appropriately *indicated, effective, safe, and convenient* and at the lowest cost to them and their community. This definition has many moving parts, some moving faster than others.

Pharmacists are increasingly called upon to harmonise technological advancements with human-centred care, ensuring optimal healthcare delivery within this rapidly evolving landscape. The integration of digital tools such as Pharmacy Management Systems (PMS) and Clinical Decision Support Systems (CDSS) is crucial for improving medication safety and patient outcomes. Tele-pharmacy services further extend the reach of pharmaceutical care, particularly in underserved communities, by enabling remote consultations, adherence monitoring, and chronic disease management. The expansion of tele-pharmacy aligns with the broader vision of enhancing healthcare accessibility, as outlined in the National Digital Health Strategy for South Africa (2019–2024), which emphasises the role of digital technologies in improving healthcare quality and access.

However, these advancements outpace regulatory frameworks that cannot keep up with innovation. Often it is those in rural settings and that are underserved that need these innovations most, for example, Section 22A(6)(i) of the Medicines and Related Substances Act 101 of 1965 requires a new prescription every 30 days for Schedule 6 medications like methylphenidate. This requirement can lead to treatment interruptions, particularly for patients in remote areas or those with limited mobility.¹ In the realm of electronic prescribing, platforms like EMGuidance Script[®] and others have emerged as solutions, utilising advanced electronic signatures (AES) to ensure the authenticity and security of prescriptions. These platforms enable the electronic transmission of prescriptions, including those for Schedule 6 medications, provided they meet the legislative requirements outlined in Regulation 33 of the Medicines and Related Substances Act. This technology not only streamlines the prescribing process but also enhances patient safety by reducing errors and improving access to medication.

Pharmacists are constantly challenged to navigate technological advancements, still practising with the regulatory frameworks while addressing broader systemic issues. Pharmacists are, in my opinion, still the unsung heroes of the healthcare team.

Despite their qualifications and readiness to contribute to an overburdened healthcare system, many newly graduated pharmacists remain without permanent roles. Strategic interventions are needed to absorb this skilled workforce into meaningful positions, including incentivising rural placements and fostering entrepreneurship through mentorship programmes (more mentioned in the PSSA Young Pharmacists' Group, 2025). Please support this initiative and young pharmacists in general, excellent mentorship programmes available.

South African pharmacists have to remain vigilant with the recent uncertainty surrounding PEPFAR funding which threatens South Africa's HIV response, potentially leading to over 600 000 HIV-related deaths and 500 000 new infections in the next decade.² PEPFAR has been instrumental in supporting the country's HIV programmes, constituting around 18% of the response. Pharmacists play a pivotal role in mitigating this crisis by leveraging programmes such as Pharmacy Initiated Management of Antiretroviral Therapy (PIMART), which empowers trained pharmacists to prescribe antiretrovirals. The matter is still pending verdict from the Constitutional court.³ By expanding access to HIV prevention and treatment services, pharmacists can enhance medication adherence and improve patient outcomes.³ Currently, pharmacists (within the Multidisciplinary Team) are already playing a pivotal role in promoting medication adherence through counselling and support, which is crucial for maintaining effective HIV treatment regimens.⁴

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of Dr. Mariet Eksteen, whose dedication to the PSSA has been a beacon of excellence. I have worked with Mariet for many years and in different scenarios and settings. I can say the common denominator for me is her tireless efforts in serving the profession of pharmacy, and, by extension, the public of South Africa. Thank you for your hard work Mariet, you have left an indelible mark on the profession. As you embark on your new chapter, we wish you happiness and success, knowing that you will continue to inspire future generations of pharmacists.

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