



Nibbles

What's in a name?

At least fifty years ago, before the world of pharmacy had to adapt to the growing presence of large corporates, and decades before the advent of computers and scanners in pharmacy, a community pharmacist was expected to know all his clients by name. Furthermore, when you got the call for a repeat prescription, it would invariably be along the lines of, "Ask Mr Black for more of my pills, please, but only the white ones, not the little pink ones for under the tongue, I still have enough of those, OK?" You, as the pharmacist, were expected to know exactly what they were talking about!

In my father's pharmacy, Tarka Pharmacy, which served a large farming community, things went a step further. The farming families had been there for many generations and the farms were traditionally handed down from father to eldest son. Usually the son also inherited the father's name so you would need to distinguish whether you were speaking to the senior or junior of the two. The next problem was that there would be cousins bearing the same name. For example, there were at least two Harry van Heerdens. The solution to this dilemma was to distinguish them by the names of their farms so that you had Harry van Heerden, *Middelkraal* and Harry van Heerden, *Schaapkraal*. Their parcels for collection were labelled accordingly and you had to be careful in checking that the right parcel (and account) went to the right Harry van Heerden!

About thirty years ago, while working as a community pharmacist, I had my own interesting experiences, one of which was the following...

Our client, Mrs V, was a kindly soul but rather simple. Some would contend that, in her case, the lift did not quite go all the way up to the top floor! She was large, loud and brash. Mean folk would call her "common". She was actually kind and generous in her own way and her pharmacy account was often in arrears, not from buying niceties for herself, but rather medicine for her grandchildren and gifts for friends. Her command of "die Ingelsman se taal" was not great and one had to listen closely to understand exactly what she was requesting.

When Mrs V came to town, you could hear her a mile away as she strode the main road, cheerfully greeting all and sundry at the top of her booming voice. In her tent-like dress, usually of a loud, gory colour, and large enough to cover her bountiful body, she strutted down the road like a clucking mother-hen with a number of her grandchildren in tow. When she swept into the pharmacy with her entourage, she would greet everybody with a huge smile and a loud broadcast of, "Hello peoples!" Her mere presence filled the entire pharmacy whilst our staff needed to be on full alert watching the grandchildren running amok between the aisles.

Then one day it happened...Mrs V, at the top of her booming voice, loud enough for the whole pharmacy to hear, asked our front shop assistant,

*"Ag, Bokkie, just ask the chemist to give me some more of my **vagina** pills, please!"*

A number of other clients of a more genteel nature, now rather embarrassed, shuffled hastily along out of the way, pretending not to hear.

When our assistant gave Mrs V a puzzled look and politely asked her to repeat her request, she said, patting her more than ample bosom,

"Ag, bokkie, you know mos, my vagina pills for the pains in my chest, man!"

Having heard this loud request all the way from the dispensary, I could hardly contain myself as I went about dispensing Mrs V's monthly supply of **angina** tablets without further question!

But, then again, as The Bard wrote;

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet."

Ek sê maar net!

Gary Black