



Reimagining pharmacy: leadership renewal, professional ontology, and a global call for impact

As South Africa marks Pharmacy Month under the banner “Think Health, Think Pharmacy – One Profession, Many Roles”, the landscape of the profession is being redrawn by dynamic leadership transitions, explicit calls for social accountability, and renewed reflection on pharmacy’s foundational ontology. Globally, the FDA’s action in September to initiate a label change for acetaminophen (Tylenol and similar products) to reflect evidence suggesting that use by pregnant women may be associated with an increased risk of neurological conditions such as autism and ADHD in children is not merely a regulatory footnote—it is a cautionary tale in the collective evolution of pharmaceutical practice, reminding all South African pharmacists that our currency lies not only in the products we dispense, but in the calibrated judgment we apply to their risks and benefits, especially for vulnerable populations. The recent appointment of Professor Renier Coetzee as President, with Johannes Ravele as Deputy President, and Lynette Terblanche as Honorary Treasurer, signals a generational and strategic shift. Their stewardship will influence not only national policy discussions but also international participation in humanitarian health agendas.

Yet, while individual appointments guide direction, it is the collective evolution of the profession itself that warrants critical appraisal. Pharmacy in 2025 is negotiating the ever-increasing tension between traditional dispensing and a broader, more epistemologically plural identity: pharmacist as clinician, diagnostician, advocate, and innovator. This is evident in the way local pharmacists tackle emergent public health imperatives—whether in vaccine campaigns, chronic disease prevention, or health literacy efforts—which now require fluency beyond compounding and distribution, demanding skills in data interpretation, patient dialogue, and agile systems thinking.

This evolution is foregrounded in the International Pharmaceutical Federation’s (FIP) World Pharmacists Day campaign: “Think Health, Think Pharmacist” (<https://www.fip.org/wpd2025-supporter>). FIP’s call to action is unambiguous: pharmacists must translate global knowledge into local impact, employ digital tools thoughtfully, and advocate for policy frameworks in which every pharmacist operates at the top of their licence, accountable for both technical quality and

societal good. Creating a supporter graphic online and contributing to the digital chorus of pharmacy’s value reminds us that international solidarity and local relevance are mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive.

September invites reflection on what it means to be a pharmacist—philosophically and practically. The ontology of the profession is under revision: from a mechanistic, product-focused practice to a systemically aware, people-centred, and ethically driven enterprise. The public health outreach campaigns of today are not simply celebratory rituals but critical experiments in interprofessional, community-based care. Their success or failure must ultimately be measured by health outcomes, not just the volume of interventions delivered.

Pharmacy is at an inflection point. Leadership renewal must foster deep engagement with complexity, humility in the face of uncertainty, and an unwavering commitment to equity and evidence. The moment demands not only that we do more, but that we become more—more critical, more collaborative, more human. Let this Pharmacy Month be the marker where we collectively move from celebrating what pharmacy is, to courageously defining what it can—and must—become.

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