



Beyond the counter: Pharmacy month through the eyes of the future

Thinavhuyo Musekene

Pharmacy Month has always been about highlighting the vital role of pharmacists in healthcare. But this year something different stood out: the voice of the future. Young pharmacists across South Africa did not just take part – they reshaped the way Pharmacy Month was celebrated.

Stepping beyond the counter

For decades, the image of a pharmacist has been closely tied to the dispensary. While that remains central, today's young professionals are showing that pharmacy goes far beyond teaching and learning about medication, production and supply of medication, counting tablets and filling prescriptions. During this year's Pharmacy Month, the youth was actively involved in public health campaigns, school outreach programmes, digital storytelling, and wellness initiatives that connected with communities in fresh and unexpected ways.

It was about redefining the narrative: pharmacists are not just behind the counter, but also in classrooms, clinics, social spaces, and online platforms – meeting patients where they are.

The fresh energy of a new generation

The hallmark of this year's celebrations was creativity. From using social media reels to demystify complex medicines, to creating pop-up health stations in communities, young pharmacists embraced new ways of delivering old messages. The goal was clear: to make health information accessible, relatable, and memorable.

This fresh energy did not replace tradition – it built on it. By drawing from the mentorship of senior colleagues and blending it with youthful innovation, young pharmacists have demonstrated how intergenerational collaboration strengthens pharmacy's presence.

What the future sees

Through the eyes of young pharmacists, the future of the profession is bold and adaptive. It is one where pharmacists:

- Lead in preventative health through vaccination, screening, and education,
- Harness technology and digital platforms to expand patient reach,
- Champion collaboration with other healthcare professionals, and
- Continue to be trusted, approachable figures in communities.

The message is simple: the future of pharmacy is bigger than behind the counter – it is everywhere, where health is needed.

Closing with gratitude

The PSSA YPG extends sincere thanks to all pharmacy managers, healthcare stakeholders, mentors, and institutions who opened doors for young pharmacists to contribute meaningfully during Pharmacy Month. Most importantly, we thank our communities for allowing us to walk with them on their health journeys.

Pharmacy Month 2025 reminded us that pharmacy is not just about where we stand, but how far we reach. And the future, seen through the eyes of young pharmacists, is limitless.

Feel free to reach out to us at | Email: ypg@pssa.org.za | Facebook: Young Pharmacists' Group of PSSA | Instagram: @pssaypg
LinkedIn: Young Pharmacists' Group of PSSA

Young pharmacists – connected, engaged, empowered and inspired!

Empowering patients at the healthcare worker-patient interface, using a medication counselling modality

Telicia Jobraj, B. Pharm, M. Pharm candidate

Pharmacist, Dr Pixley Ka Isaka Seme Memorial Hospital

Based on the project which was awarded the Professional Innovation Project 2025 grant by the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa, Young Pharmacists' Group (PSSA YPG)

A patient walks into a busy public clinic to collect her medicine. She is anxious, clutching a slip of paper, and unsure about how to take the treatment. Minutes later, she walks out; not just with her medicine, but with a clear understanding of why she needs it, how to take it, what to expect, and when to return if something feels wrong. She leaves confident, in control, and empowered.

That transformation happened in under five minutes, through a single, structured conversation with a pharmacist. Now imagine if every patient in South Africa, whether in a rural clinic or a tertiary hospital, had that same experience. This is the vision driving our work, and it's what inspired the Standardised Counselling Tool Protocol.

Personal introduction

As a public sector pharmacist in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) with a passion for improving the way we serve patients through high quality, patient-centred care. My professional background spans quality improvement, mentorship, and advocacy within the South African Association of Hospital and Institutional Pharmacists (SAAHIP) and the

Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa (PSSA). My daily work continues to show me the meaningful impact a pharmacist can have in shaping a patient's health journey and how much potential we have to make that experience consistently empowering and meaningful.

For me, pharmacy is not just about dispensing medicines; it's about ensuring patients understand their treatment, feel confident to take it correctly, and know what to expect from it. It is about the conversation that transforms a packet of tablets into a tool for recovery, and the trust built when patients feel genuinely heard and informed.

Origin story – Discovering the counselling protocol concept

In 2022, I attended a SAHIP meeting where Sameshin Reddy introduced the concept of a standardised medication counselling tool - a powerful idea that I resonated with immediately. I recognised in it a solution to a long-standing challenge I had observed in both primary healthcare clinics and larger regional

hospitals: the variability in the quality and completeness of medication counselling provided to patients.

Sometimes, patients walked away confident and informed; other times, they left uncertain about how or why to take their medicines. The differences often came down to time constraints, staff turnover, or varying levels of training and communication skills among healthcare workers. I imagined what it would mean if every patient, regardless of where they received their care, could have the same high quality, comprehensive counselling experience, one that met professional standards and truly empowered them to take charge of their health.

That vision stayed with me and when the opportunity arose to put it into action, I knew we had to try.

Motivation and vision – Patient-centred care and medicine literacy

Medicine literacy is more than knowing the name of a drug; it's about patients understanding what the medicine is for, how to take it, what to expect, and when to seek help. It is about equipping them with the knowledge and confidence to be active participants in their own health.

In South Africa's public healthcare system, with its high patient volumes and resource constraints, we cannot allow this critical element of care to be overlooked. Poor adherence contributes to treatment failures, avoidable complications, and wasted resources, but more importantly, it takes away from patients the power to protect and improve their own health.

My vision is to see patient-centred care embedded in every interaction, where a patient collecting medicines at a community health centre receives the same quality of counselling as one attending a higher level of care. This is about equity, dignity, and safety. It's also about sustainability: when patients understand their treatment and adhere to it, we use our healthcare resources more efficiently, reduce avoidable admissions, and protect the effectiveness of medicines.

Project journey

The project I now have the privilege to collaboratively work on is a SAHIP KZN Coastal Branch Focus Area Project under the theme of Improved Quality and Safety of Healthcare Services. This aligns not only with Pillar 5 of the Presidential Health Compact but also with National Core Standards, the Patient

Experience of Care and the Ideal Hospital Realisation and Maintenance Regulatory requirements.

The concept is to develop and implement a standardised counselling protocol that prompts healthcare workers (HCWs) to cover all essential points during medicine counselling. It's based on regulatory requirements, clinical guidelines, and communication best practice, but designed to be practical in busy, real-world settings.

This intervention forms part of a broader strategy we are exploring in the creation of different solutions to enhance the patient experience of care. We envisage the counselling protocol to be strategically positioned at pharmacy outpatient counselling areas. This will serve as a clinical counselling guideline for HCWs involved in the medication counselling process, at the patient interface. Through a continuous process of user feedback and data analysis, this project seeks to then further refine and then integrate a fit for purpose solution into the routine pharmacy outpatient dispensing workflow.

We have secured authorisation to carry out this project from the Head of Pharmaceutical Services in KwaZulu-Natal, and we are fortunate to have members from SAAHIP branches outside KZN co-opted into this focus area project. This collaboration strengthens the potential for impact and sustainability.

Gratitude and opportunity

This year, the YPG PSSA Professional Innovation Project recognised the potential of this idea and awarded it first place, along with an implementation grant. We are deeply grateful for this support, not only because it provides resources, but because it validates the importance of this work.

I first heard about this project idea back in 2022 and now, thanks to the PSSA YPG, we have the chance to turn an innovative concept into professional practice. The grant allows us to take steps that wouldn't have been possible without this support.

Winning the grant is also a powerful reminder of the value of collaboration within our profession. It shows that when we share ideas and support each other, we can create solutions that improve care for patients and strengthen our role as healthcare leaders.

Future impact – a shared vision

Imagine a healthcare system where a patient in a rural clinic and a patient in a large city hospital, both receiving their medicines from different healthcare workers but both leaving with the same clear, complete understanding of their treatment. They know how to take it, why it matters, what to watch for, and when to come back. They feel confident, respected, and involved in their own care.

That is the vision. A healthcare system where geography, facility type, or staff changes do not affect the quality of patient counselling. Where every medicine is paired with the requisite knowledge that makes it effective. This protocol will help ensure consistent, high-quality counselling becomes standard practice, not something delivered only in preparation for a Patient Experience of Care Audit.

In the long term, I believe this project can be scaled to all facilities, embedded in quality improvement frameworks, and contribute to national efforts to strengthen healthcare services. I hope it inspires more pharmacists to take the lead in developing patient-centred solutions because our profession is uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between medicine supply and optimum medicine effectiveness.

Closing thoughts

This journey is about more than a counselling protocol. It is about reimagining the patient experience, using evidence-based tools to create consistent quality in every encounter. It's about giving patients not just the medicine they need, but the knowledge and confidence to use it well.

I am proud to be part of a profession that can make this vision a reality, and I am committed to working with colleagues across sectors to see it through. My hope is that years from now, we'll look back and see this project as one small but important step towards a more equitable, effective, and sustainable healthcare system.

To the PSSA YPG - thank you for believing in this idea, for investing in its potential, and for giving us the means to turn it into action. Together, we are proving that innovation in pharmacy can start with a conversation and end with healthier, more empowered patients.