



## Growing through service: My journey with SAAHIP

The year 2020 was unlike any other. In the wake of lockdowns, the world shifted online, and suddenly opportunities for learning multiplied. I immersed myself in webinars, trainings, and Continuing Professional Development sessions, grateful for the unexpected access to knowledge that the pandemic had unlocked.

While performing routine work one day on my computer at work, a colleague, Ms Akhona Fynn, called and invited me to an online session/meeting. I assumed it was another webinar and gladly accepted, not asking for details. To my surprise, when I logged in, I found myself at the SAAHIP KZN Inland Annual General Meeting. Before I could process what was happening, nominations began, and I was proposed as Executive Secretary by Mr Vusi Dlamini. Shocked and overwhelmed, I called Ms Fynn afterward in a panic, convinced I was unprepared. Her calm reassurance and promise of support gave me the courage to accept the role.

That decision marked the beginning of a transformative journey. Working alongside Mr Vusi Dlamini as Chairperson, Ms Azraa Bassa as Vice Chair, and Ms Akhona Fynn as Immediate Past Chair, I learned the value of teamwork, mentorship, and resilience. We implemented monthly meetings, strengthened branch activities, and built a culture of collaboration.

At the 2023 AGM, I was nominated as Vice Chair. Once again, I doubted myself, but Mr Dlamini's encouragement pushed me forward. He entrusted me with responsibilities that stretched my confidence and skills whether managing committee matters or presenting at national webinars. Each challenge became an opportunity to grow, and I began to take pride in accomplishments that once felt impossible.

By 2025, when Mr Dlamini was nominated as Vice President to the SAAHIP National Committee, I stepped into the role of Branch Chairperson with far less hesitation. The experiences of the past five

years had prepared me to lead. I had learned that discomfort is often the birthplace of growth, and that with the support of colleagues, daunting tasks can be managed with success.

Beyond leadership, SAAHIP expanded my professional network across provinces. Through conferences and countless WhatsApp groups, I discovered that pharmacists nationwide share similar challenges and triumphs. These exchanges not only offered solutions but also fostered solidarity. I realised that many colleagues pursue advanced qualifications Master's and Doctoral degrees in Pharmacy, Law, and Business Management which inspired me to embark on my own Master's journey (in my forties).

Being part of SAAHIP awakened talents I had not fully recognised and gave me the platform to nurture them. It showed me that growth often comes from stepping into unfamiliar spaces, supported by a community that believes in you.

### A Call to Colleagues

My journey is not unique, it is a testament to what professional associations can do for every pharmacist. By joining and actively participating, you gain more than titles or responsibilities; you gain confidence, mentorship, and a network that stretches across the country. You discover new opportunities, broaden your perspective, and unlock potential you may not even realise you have.

To my colleagues in the KwaZulu-Natal Inland Branch and beyond: you are surrounded by talented, supportive professionals. Reach out, engage, and embrace the opportunities. Joining a professional association is not just about service it is about growth, empowerment, and shaping the future of pharmacy together.

**R Bhikraj**