

Leading the Academy – a personal journey

Two terms of office as the National Chairperson of the SA Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care have had a profound impact on me – for better or worse. When I started, being young and naïve I had no idea about the magnitude of the task I was taking on. Now I know the full meaning of the expression “fools rush in where angels fear to tread”.

These six years have given me considerable insight into the profession and challenges it faces. It has been a vastly enriching experience to work with family practitioners throughout South Africa and the international community.

One of the first challenges that confronted me was establishing the financial integrity of the organisation which had been rocked by a series of unfortunate setbacks. Today the Academy is financially well placed – although not rich – thanks to strong fiscal discipline, rationalisation and the development of additional income streams.

The development of our CPD accreditation portfolio has been a remarkable achievement and has resulted in recognition of the Academy's role in setting and maintaining standards for the profession. Today we are one of the foremost accreditors in the country.

Another outstanding accomplishment has been the resurrection and development of our official mouthpiece – the SA Family Practice inc. *Geneeskunde Journal*. It is now a peer-reviewed journal of international quality and acclaim thanks to an enormous effort from many people. It is the only accredited research journal for family practice in South Africa.

I had the privilege of presiding over a number of conferences during my term of office, including the 11th National Family Practitioners' Congress at Sun City in 1999, the WONCA World Congress in Durban in 2001 and recently the 12th National Family Practitioners' Congress at Stellenbosch. The WONCA Congress placed South Africa firmly on the international family practice map and the election of Bruce Sparks as the WONCA President-Elect was a fantastic personal and national triumph.

The calibre of people participating in the Stellenbosch Congress was more than impressive, indicating that the profession of Family Practice in South Africa has reached recognition and maturity. It was great to see many of my friends and colleagues contributing both their experiences and research to a national meeting which drew an international audience. I salute you for your achievements and tenacity which has given me the assurance that family medicine is alive and well in South Africa.

Probably one of the most crucial decisions made by the National Council during my term was the decision that the Academy should work actively against the fragmentation of the profession. One of the ways that this has been achieved was the establishment of a Network of collaboration with the Academy, CFP SA, Famec and RUDASA. Such a Network can achieve much for the profession using its combined strengths and resources.

The Rural Health Initiative (RHI) was one of the Academy's creations that was started during Bruce Sparks' term of office. It has continued to grow over the last six years and it aims to support and develop the health of rural peoples through the development of projects and the deployment of health professionals in rural areas. The RHI has been successful in drawing corporate funding for both social development and positive moves towards equity in health care.

Research underpins the development of any discipline and in this respect, family practice has moved forward boldly with the establishment of the South African Sentinel Practitioners' Network (SASPREN). Not only does it serve as the Academy's research arm but is the only network that systematically collects information from academic and private family practice.

Another exciting project is the updating of the popular SA FP Manual. We are currently reviewing the Manual and will be negotiating publishing contracts in collaboration with Famec. The new Manual will be a complete “how to” series of guidelines for urban and rural family practice.

I believe that the Academy and the profession of family practice have a great future in South Africa. The wealth of talent and experience that the Academy has built up over the last six years is reflected in the people who will be taking over the leadership, the management and the running of the organisation.

I would like to thank everybody who has assisted me during my terms of office as National Chairperson. I am grateful to you for your support without which we could never have achieved as much as we have.

I wish the new National Council great success under the able leadership of Shadrack Mazaza (National Chairperson) and Gboyega Ogunbanjo (National Treasurer). I hope your journey in leading the Academy will be as rewarding as mine has been.

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