

# EDITORIAL

## COMPASSION: OUR TRUE VOCATION?

### CIRCULATION

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### JOURNAL POLICY

SA Family Practice is published monthly by the SA Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care.

It offers a voice to local family practice, placing original contributions from the research of family practitioners/primary health care workers as a priority. It aims at stimulating original research amongst family practitioners. The length of articles should preferably not exceed 2 000 words. References should be in accordance with the Vancouver system. Three copies of a contribution, typed in double spacing, should be submitted. Articles will be sent to expert referees before acceptance for publication. The journal also has an update or continuing education section, placing review articles that take cognizance of the information needs and frames of reference of primary health care clinicians. SA Family Practice further serves as the mouthpiece of the Academy. As such, meetings are reported on, along with other news.

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I went to collect a Kenyan friend from the Pan African Federation for Mother and Child Health (PAFMACH) conference held recently in Midrand. While waiting for him to sort out some minor details with the reception, I bumped into a family physician colleague. I was distressed to hear from her that throughout the week, the delegates (from all over Africa and other parts of the world) had emphasised the role of paediatricians, obstetricians and nurses in meeting the needs of mother and child health care. The general practitioner/family physician was either ignored or seen as irrelevant.

Could part of the reason for this be that in Africa, as in the United States, more than half of the citizens feel that doctors do not care about people as much as they used to and that doctors are too interested in making money?<sup>1</sup> As Professor Robert Rakel stated in his keynote address at the 10th SA Academy of Family Practice Congress: 'Our profession is in jeopardy when patients believe that we care more about our income than their well-being.'<sup>1</sup>

The first part of Professor Rakel's address is reproduced in this month's issue of the journal on page 476. The theme of the congress was 'caring' and Rakel juxtaposed the concept of 'compassion' with it. You will find comments about 'calloused compassion' elsewhere in the pages of this edition of the journal. (For anyone who is interested, one of the most challenging books about compassion that I have ever come across is called *A Spirituality Named Compassion and the Healing of the Global Village, Humpty Dumpty and Us*.<sup>2</sup> The author, Matthew Fox, formerly a Roman Catholic Jesuit priest and now apparently a member of the Anglican clergy, states that an essential component of compassion is 'justice'.)

A special feature of this month's journal is Vocational Training. I invited each Department of Family Medicine and each vocational training programme that the Academy knows about, to submit a short summary of what their programmes offer. I am the first to acknowledge that it is almost impossible to give an accurate perspective in 300 words, but this was the limitation I imposed upon them. The idea is to provide our readers with a brief overview of what's available and what's happening around the country. The recent controversy about 'vocational training' as 'compulsory community service' makes this a topical issue, and a report has been included on the presentation which was made by Professor Sparks to the Parliamentary Committee on Health.

Clearly the Academy (and therefore this journal) is committed to genuine 'Vocational Training' (as opposed to 'compulsory service in disguise') for generalist doctors.

### ROY JOBSON - Interim Editor

#### REFERENCES:

1. Rakel RE. To Care with Caring: Compassion and the Art of Medicine. *S Afr Fam Pract* 1996;17(11):476-8.
2. Fox M A. *Spirituality Named Compassion and the Healing of the Global Village, Humpty Dumpty and Us*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990.