

## Future of the GP

This issue of SA Family Practice coincides with the 8th Family Practice Congress. For those who are unable to attend we will be distributing a special congress supplement in a few weeks time to keep you informed.

Uncertainty reigns in South Africa while we see negotiations being on and then off and then on and then off. We are not only affected as citizens. As general practitioners in the private and public sectors we are uncertain about our future. To list a few:

- \* What is happening around us with the mushrooming of Managed Health Care?
- \* What will the future health policy be?
- \* How long will the latest document on Primary Health Care policy influence what is spent and where?

Managed Health Care is a response to escalating costs. It is a legitimate concern. If one part of society runs ahead in inflationary terms then adjustments have to be made. If we do not make these adjustments then society will eventually make them for us. Managed Health Care is here. No matter how nervous we are about this, we will have to get involved and influence the manner in which it is introduced, or else we will be entirely managed from outside without our input. In a way, the institution of the National Health System in the UK was a similar process to what we are probably in at the moment. At that time, doctors' remuneration after re-organisation, was calculated from the levels shown in their tax returns! Have you filled in your tax returns yet?

The government has as priority the promotion of Primary Health Care. It has had a fragmentary approach to Health Care for a long time. This fragmentation is still present in the latest document on Primary Health Care. If additional money is going to be spent in the field of Primary Health Care, and if the money is going to be apportioned according to the policy document, then we have not moved much towards the future. We will still end up having vertical programs and the kind of clinic system that most generalists are unable to live with. Communities also will be told what services they can have and not be able to decide for themselves if they have their own special needs.

Uncertainty reigns. Uncertainty is magnified by rumour. Uncertainty can be minimized by getting appropriate information and debating the issues in a rational manner. I want to repeat an appeal for more debate in person and in writing. We await correspondence. There is nothing as sobering as formulating and exposing your ideas to the scrutiny of others in the printed form. We can have some influence over our future but only if we participate.

*Sam Johnson*