

From Slogans to Action

For some years now there has been much talk at government level about the importance of Primary Health Care. Since Dr Rina Venter has become Minister we have seen a move from slogans toward some action. To a large extent the last two years seem to have been ones in which the legal and administrative infrastructure was prepared for a real push to commit funds and other resources to Primary Health Care.

On Thursday evening of 26 September, the project "Let's build a healthy nation" was launched to the press in Johannesburg in grand Walt Disney style. You must have seen some of this roller coaster stuff on TV by now! Some of the people present who are actually doing primary care, were calculating what they could have done with the money that was being splashed to get the press talking about primary health care. I suppose that is inevitable if you start mixing workers and advertising agencies from the private sector.

Dr Coen Slabber the Director General of National Health and Population Development in his speech said that, people should take a keen interest in their own health and play an active role in promoting good health. "Primary Health Care (PHC) is a vital part of this process. It emphasizes the role of the individual and the community in taking responsibility for themselves." In the December issue we hope to give you more detail about this campaign. Basically it will inform the public about the state of health of the nation, encourage people to get involved, inform them of how they can take responsibility for their own health and encourage individuals and organisations to get involved.

SA Family Practice wishes the campaign well but we also want to make some lamentable observations. Neither the Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care nor the National General Practitioners Group of MASA is represented on the subcommittee for PHC, nor were they invited as co-hosts for the launch of project "Healthy Nation". We still have no coherent policy for PHC on which so much money is being spent. The severe crisis of relationship between the medical and nursing professions, that is bound to have a paralysing effect on PHC, is not being addressed at top level.

The people of South Africa are being invited to participate in PHC. That includes us in generalist medicine. Let's get involved even if we were not invited by name!

Sam Felsen