



# From the editor • Van die redakteur

SA Family Practice welcomes a new monthly contribution from The Medicines Safety Centre. Dr John Straughan from UCT introduces the purpose of our new column in this editorial. With him we invite our readers to write and share their experiences with medicines. (Editor)

## Prescribing in South Africa

Preparation of essential drug lists has long been undertaken by the World Health Organisation in consultation with health care workers in particular constituencies. These are intended particularly for third world countries where economical but effective prescribing is necessary for maintenance of health, even for survival. The lists endeavour to provide a small choice of tested medicines for use in every medical contingency, at the least possible cost.

In South Africa we have an extraordinary mix of First and Third World circumstances with the latter predominating. The vast array of medicines available presents the medical practitioners, and particularly the primary care medic, with real dilemmas. These medicines may be categorised, from the point of view of safety and efficacy, as good, bad or indifferent.

It is essential that we each audit our use of medicines if we are going to provide the best and most appropriate treatment for our patients while at the same time curtailing health care costs and thus alleviating the enormous burden on the Medical Aid Societies and the taxpayer.

### Cost-effective prescribing

Cost-effective prescribing does not automatically mean choosing the cheapest medicine available. It means using the most effective medicine which is the least expensive of its

kind. This is no mean task. In the absence of a formal list of essential drugs, we need to use our critical faculties to the utmost and to obtain the most objective drug information available. We need to look at the medicines we prescribe (as well as those we do not prescribe) and to establish the credentials of the drugs to which we expose our patients. We should be able to give cogent reasons for our use and choice of drugs.

### Sharing our experiences

In our contributions to this journal we will look critically, *inter alia* at medicine choice and usage. We would be privileged if you would share your experiences with us through the medium of these columns, enabling us to gain insight into the problems and the successes on your side of the fence. We look forward to this interaction which, we are sure, will be mutually enriching. Perhaps it will pave the way for an essential drug list for South Africa.

### Detailed drug profiles

We intend to provide detailed, objective profiles for a spectrum of representative and good medicines which we think deserve a place in your armamentarium. In this issue we look at reserpine and cyclizine, both listed as essential drugs by the World Health Organisation.

**John Straughan**  
Medicines Safety Centre