



## From the editor • Van die redakteur

### Huisartse faal

### • GPs are failing

Both those generalists working as salaried doctors in the public sector, and those in private practice are not considered crucial to the health of the South African population. Two recent conversations made this very clear to me:

A measles epidemic recently caused a controversy in one of our cities. It occurred amongst children normally cared for in the private sector. The city health officers wished us to bring it to the attention of general practitioners that measles was a notifiable disease. They felt that many more measles cases occurred than were notified. They were not willing to supply specific information for publication - probably to avoid controversy. That is assuming that they are sure of their facts.

At the same time I was clearly made to understand by another, this time an ex-MOH, that general practitioners from the private sector in his experience have been singularly unwilling to participate meaningfully in matters of public health, such as immunisation, child welfare, ante-natal clinics and family planning. Nurses are doing a far better job. In any case, they are quite capable of doing this without the help of generalists of any description, whether from the public or private sector.

How can generalists then be useful? "Well,

they can look after the few minor ailments the nurses cannot cope with in the public sector. You know, the curative stuff." On the other hand, "There is a role for the GP in private practice." I wonder what this could be? Perhaps again, a purely curative function that does not really contribute to the level of healthiness of the community, except perhaps that of the general practitioners. After all, they cannot even prevent measles in their own practice population, and when it does occur they fail to notify it.

I am by no means suggesting that all our colleagues in community health and administrative posts share these views, but I do sense that there is a large number in important places who feel this way.

What do we, as generalists, do with this? Is this all true? If so, why is it like this? Let's have some reaction. Please fill in the reverse of the inserted questionnaire: all generalists; those in private practice as well as those stuck away behind 'minor ailments' queues in polyclinics, day hospitals and out-patient departments.

Dit is geen grap nie. Dit is die mening van party van u en my kollegas. Dit is 'n mening wat sterk genoeg is om landsbeleid vorentoe te bepaal as ons gaan stilbly. Ons wil graag weet of die skoen u pas, of nie, en wat u van die hele kwessie dink.

*Sam Felsen*