Pharmacists …….identify yourselves with pride!

Introduction:
Some pharmacists have a negative perception of the requirement of Good Pharmacy Practice Rules to identify themselves clearly and the legal requirement to personally sign orders and copies of prescriptions. This article is an attempt to dispel the myth that these requirements are a petty irritation sent to annoy us and will provide suggestions on how to make these obligations work positively in your favour.

Lessons from history
In the past many pharmacists took great pride in their profession and the services they offered. They used their own names to identify both their pharmacies and their products. This was a subtle yet courageous way of promoting themselves as professionals and their unique products with confidence. Names of pharmacists such as Petersen, Lennon, EJ Adcock are still, to this day, synonymous with well known brands and companies. Are pharmacists of today brave enough to do the same, to stand out and be identified by name?

So, what makes you different or special?

Graduates emerge from university with similar levels of knowledge and the efficiencies required to dispense medicine or manage a pharmacy are quickly learnt. Pharmacy is practiced according to the philosophy of pharmaceutical care which specifies that, to be really effective, medicine needs to be dispensed with appropriate advice, instruction and monitoring by the pharmacist. The “art” of dispensing now requires good communication skills and an ability to be empathetic rather than technical ability to compound a preparation.

So, what sets you, as an individual professional, apart? When do you know that you “have arrived”, that your advice and professional expertise is valued? Surely the answer must be, “When clients ask for you by name and are prepared to wait to speak to you, personally”!

The “My Concept”

“Relationships” has become one of the most important buzzwords in marketing. Many businesses have seen value in moving from transaction marketing in which emphasis is placed on making an individual sale, to relationship marketing which emphasizes the individual customer and aims at establishing a long-term relationship between the company and the customer.
As a pharmacist, the greatest value you can bring to the business or organization that you work for is the relationship you establish with the clients that you deal with personally. Your responsiveness and the professional manner in which you, the pharmacist attend to the individual needs of the clients leads to the loyalty with which the clients respond to the pharmacy/company in the long-term. When people start speaking of you as “My Pharmacist”, you know that you have established a sound professional relationship with them, which, over time, will be invaluable to the entity that employs you. For pharmacists this is applicable in almost every work setting whether it be hospital, community, wholesale, consultancy or manufacturing pharmacy. In all pharmacies the quality of the professional relationship that you, the pharmacist, can establish with the clients, is vital to the success of the business.

Establishing a customer relationship.

The interaction between a pharmacist and the client usually involves a face-to-face encounter and the disclosure of intimate personal details by the client. For this relationship to be firmly established, you, the pharmacist must firstly gain the trust and confidence of the client. This, in turn, requires the pharmacist to demonstrate a number of personal, professional qualities including empathy, integrity, reliability and dependability, a sound knowledge of the client’s condition and sensitivity to their medicine requirements, effective communication, trust, respect and competence.

To achieve this, the pharmacist must continuously work at cultivating a better professional image of himself. The first step in doing so must surely be to be easily identifiable!

What does the law say?

Good Pharmacy Practice Rules specify:

1.2.1 Appearance Of Pharmacy Premises

(c) The name of the responsible pharmacist must be displayed conspicuously over the main entrance of a pharmacy.

(d) The name and surname of the pharmacist(s) on duty must be displayed conspicuously in or outside the pharmacy for purposes of identification of such person(s) by the public.

(e) The pharmacist(s) and pharmacy support personnel on duty must wear a name tag or badge indicating his/her name and registered designation (e.g. responsible pharmacist, specialist, etc) for the purposes of identification of such person by the public. This may be combined into a single badge or two separate badges.

What are your ethical obligations?

The Code of Conduct for Pharmacists specifies that; “A pharmacist must uphold the honour and dignity of the profession and may not engage in any activity which could bring the profession into disrepute”.

Furthermore, the pharmacist must practice, “from pharmacy premises that comply with good pharmacy practice standards, which reflect the professional character of pharmacy.”

To meet these obligations the professionals themselves must be identifiable, behave professionally and be neat, professional and friendly.
What are the Patients’ Rights?

Point 6 of the *Patients Rights Charter* specifies that a patient has the right to be;

“*Treated by a named health care provider*

*Everyone has a right to know the person that is providing health care and therefore must be attended to by only clearly identified health providers.*”

What to do about it!

- **React positively** - do not merely display the name of the responsible pharmacist in small letters above the door, but rather display the name boldly and prominently at the main entrance with a good photograph of the responsible pharmacist and contact details, especially for after-hour service.
- **Look the part!** Attend to personal appearance, dress appropriately, be well groomed, look professional. Ensure that the dress code distinguishes the pharmacist from other staff.
- **Identify yourself clearly** - wear name badges, preferably including a photograph of the individual, clearly designated as a pharmacist. The pharmacist should be distinguishable from his pharmacist’s assistant.
- **Use business cards** freely with a photo of yourself and as much detail as possible, including your qualifications, registration number and contact details.
- **Identify all pharmacists and pharmacist’s assistants on duty**, not just by a small name board but rather by a large display of names with, photos, qualifications and designations clearly indicated. (take a leaf out of the book of some of the larger motor service centres where their service managers and personnel are clearly identified, well groomed and quick to offer you a business card!)
- **Encourage patients to ask for you by name.**
- **Be seen around town!** Use the advertorials and social pages of your local newspaper and your pharmacy newsletters to display your photograph and be identified as the pharmacist at the particular pharmacy.

Your signature….your own distinctive mark!

Do you remember how as a child, when you first learnt cursive writing, you spent hours trying to perfect a signature which would be distinctive and be the envy of all your friends? Can you remember the nervous thrill of signing your first cheque?

You commonly use your signature to ratify, accept, or endorse all legal documents including invoices, orders, lease agreements etc. Prescriptions, written orders for scheduled medicines, and referral or sick notes are legal documents which should be signed clearly by the pharmacist. You would not dream of dispensing an unsigned prescription from a doctor, so, similarly, you should sign all pharmacist initiated prescriptions and be identified as the prescriber and/or dispenser of the script.
What does the law say?

There are many laws and regulations governing the supply and control of medicines for which the pharmacist must take legal responsibility. At every stage of the manufacturing process, the distribution, ordering, dispensing and final destruction of medicines, the pharmacist responsible must be clearly identifiable. This is all done by signing the relevant documents.

What are your ethical obligations?

Consider: “The Rules Relating to the Acts and Omissions in respect of which the Council may take Disciplinary Steps

3. **Failure, by a person dispensing a prescription, to indicate on the prescription that it was dispensed by him**.”

Clearly the pharmacist responsible for any professional activity should be identifiable and he is therefore required to sign all relevant documentation as proof of his acceptance and authorisation of the particular professional activity.

Patients’ Rights

As indicated above, the patient has the right to know the name of the person providing the service. In the case of a prescription, the patient has the right to know who the dispenser was and if the dispensing was done by a pharmacist’s assistant, the supervising pharmacist must also be identified.

What to do about it!

- **Don't just sign, make sure you are clearly identifiable**! Print your name and initials next to your signature, or, better still have a rubber stamp made with your name, initials, qualifications, SAPC registration number and a contact number which you can use when signing. NOTE: The ethical rules of doctors require them to sign and print their name on any prescription, order, or certificate. Surely the same principle should apply to all other healthcare professionals including pharmacists?

- Make sure that your computer generated copy scripts provide for the dispenser (pharmacist assistant) and the supervising pharmacist to be identified clearly.
  
  I would suggest that the names of both be printed next to the signature.

- Ensure that all pharmacists and PA’s stick to using their own computer access codes when dispensing. This record can serve as a measure of the productivity of the individual as well as ensuring that they take responsibility for their professional activities of dispensing or pharmacist initiated therapy.

- **Changes to original prescriptions must be endorsed by the pharmacist responsible.** These changes could be generic substitution, or other alterations as a result of your professional intervention in identifying possible drug interactions, adverse or allergic reactions etc.

- **Keep an incident book** to record complaints, errors, and interventions. Record the remedial action taken and the results achieved. Sign each clearly.
Conclusion.

The legal requirements for the pharmacist to be clearly identified in person and by signature were obviously established to ensure that the particular pharmacist responsible can be held legally accountable for his actions. This is done primarily in the interests of the patient. However, this legal requirement to be clearly identified, should be seen as an opportunity for the pharmacist to promote himself positively. Signing prescriptions and other documents can also serve as a recorded measure of his professional work. Perhaps we should adapt an old cliché and declare ourselves to be “PROUDLY a PHARMACIST!”

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Disclaimer: This document is a guideline and does not necessarily reflect official policy of the Pharmaceutical Society of SA. Any member wishing to implement proposals made in this document, must do so in accordance with the requirements of the Pharmacy Act, Medicines & Related Substances Act and all other relevant legislation, and, if necessary, should seek legal advice to ensure compliance.

Additional information and copies of references are available on request from gary@pssacwp.co.za or tel: 021-683 7313

References:

1 Customer Behaviour- a Southern African Perspective”: by MC Cant, A Brink, and S Brijdal. (Juta & Co Ltd. ISBN 0702158321)

2 Rules relating to Good Pharmacy Practice – Section 1.2.1

3 Rules relating to Code of Conduct – Section 1.2

4 Rules relating to Code of Conduct – Section 1.8

5 Patient Rights Charter – Section 6

6 Rules relating to acts or omissions in respect of which the council may take disciplinary steps – Rule 3

7. I was your customer – Peter Cheales ( Zebra Press, June 2000 ISBN 1-86872-338-0)