The past 2.5 years has been an extraordinarily eventful period for the new Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). It came into being amidst great controversy in 1998 following democratic elections, in which a largely "pale male" (to quote the Sunday newspapers) Medical and Dental Professional Board (MDPB) was elected. Dr. Zuma, the then Minister of Health, dragged her feet in appointing her representatives to the MDPB for months, probably hoping the "problem" would go away if she waited long enough, and delaying the inauguration of the new HPCSA and its Professional Boards. No sooner than the new HPCSA first met, its newly appointed CEO and Registrar, Dr. Ashley Memela, resigned amidst a cloud of controversy, compounding the administrative problems plaguing the organisation after an extensive transformation process.

A new crisis of much larger proportions is simmering underneath the surface. There are increasing concerns that the HPCSA is failing in its primary mission, to protect the public against the unprofessional and sometimes dangerous conduct of some members of the health professions. Newspapers are regularly reporting about the poor performance of the investigative and judicial system underpinning the HPCSA's action against practitioners accused of misbehaving in their profession. The perception is that lawyers defending practitioners in professional conduct enquiries have an easy task against the inexperienced and at times perceived to be incompetent legal practitioners employed by the HPCSA. The HPCSA has recently employed its own legal practitioners in order to save costs. Some of the young and inexperienced lawyers employed by the HPCSA had to face the very best legal brains in the private sector; the best money can buy.