THE CARING PROFESSION

We family practitioners are in the caring profession. In this edition of the Journal you will learn how we care about quality in our clinical work, how to care for children with gastro-enteritis and adults with functional dyspepsia. You will read about our concerns for the influence of social factors on the health status of our patients, and see the unique way that rural doctors care for their communities. Why then are we often accused of being indifferent? Why does a patient die in a wheelchair outside a health care facility? Why do patients have to suffer a slow death after being denied access to a dialysis programme?

Perhaps the easy way out is to answer that we have no money, a severe shortage of health personnel, too much politics in the health sector. We are overworked, abused, underpaid and not valued. This is, however, simplistic. For the fact remains that we struggle to achieve unity in our profession, we promote individualistic agendas, and we are not prepared to share our privileges. We are more concerned with our own ego (the Afrikaans describes it aptly as “die eie ek”) than with the well being of others.

The answer to this troubling conflict lies somewhere in the clash between power and love. Power is a form of self protection. We are trapped in the mind and the pain it brings, trying to fight off death each day. We become obsessed with control in order to combat our fear. Compassion, on the other hand, is a form of love — accepting others as they are — without judgement or superiority.¹

We cannot preach patient-centred care, and yet not be able to care for our own inner life. We need to return to an awareness of ourselves, our own shortcomings, conflicts, urges and mistakes. Only when our own inner turmoil subsides will there be a path for change to begin. In the light of a calm, steady self-awareness, a feeling of wholeness will wake up inside of us. Then the fear and the need for power will be gone. Only then can we begin to return to care for our patients as a whole.

The great Sufi poet Rumi calls us to this freedom — “Out beyond ideas of right doing and wrong doing there is a field I'll meet you there.”

Dr M de Villiers, Guest Editor

¹ Chepra D.
Unconditional love — Discovering the power to fulfill your dreams.