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## Holistic internship project report 2017 to 2020

PSSA National Office, 29 January 2020

### Background

For the first time in 2017, the pharmacy profession experienced that BPharm graduates were not successful in obtaining and securing internship positions for the following year. The situation was unprecedented, as the annual output of pharmacy students did not increase by the same ratio, when compared with the number of graduates unable to secure internship positions.

#### 1. Internship Placement Survey (Action 1)

Towards the end of 2017, a list with 252 names of graduates without internship was compiled by stakeholders including SAACP and ICPA. Due to this situation, the PSSA decided to conduct two surveys on internship placements and to collect data from both the unemployed final year pharmacy students who were unable to secure internship positions, as well as pharmacy managers or responsible pharmacists who were in a position to employ pharmacy staff. A total of 96 of these unemployed graduates and 143 pharmacy managers or responsible pharmacists completed the respective surveys.

Recommendations from both surveys were:

- 1.1. Interns should approach the facilities where they work their 400 hours during undergraduate training for potential internship. Negotiations should highlight the potential return on investment to the pharmacist or pharmacy owner of employing the undergraduate as a future intern.
- 1.2. Potential competitive advantages over other intern applicants will be to master either the specific dispensing programme used in the specific pharmacy where they apply for internship or to master as many dispensing programmes as possible, previous work experience from working in other pharmacies, unique capabilities and potential value-add to the pharmacy such as additional courses or knowledge which is additional to the BPharm curriculum.
- 1.3. Currently, no incentive exists for the benefit of the institution that trains the intern, thus interns should consider agreeing to return to the pharmacy after community service as an added return on investment for the pharmacy.
- 1.4. Interns must exhibit an attitude of willingness to learn as much as possible and do whatever is assigned to them, which may include dispensing, patient counselling, stock ordering and receipt thereof, organising the dispensary or assisting colleagues with a higher workload.
- 1.5. Graduates should not limit their internship applications to only one or a few provinces and/or sectors of pharmacy.

- 1.6. Graduates should keep track of internship applications submitted and continue to apply for vacancies until notification of a successful application is received.
- 1.7. Graduates with provincial bursaries should remind the relevant provincial head of pharmaceutical services of their bursary at the beginning of their final year so that the necessary budgetary allocations for the following year can be confirmed.
- 1.8. PSSA members with internship vacancies can forward details to the National Office where the information will be uploaded to the PSSA website for access by pharmacy students.
- 1.9. PSSA will present a webinar to members on how to approach the Health and Welfare Sectoral Education and Training Authority (HW SETA) for internship funding for Skills Development Funding (SDF).
- 1.10. Graduates requested more assistance and support from universities in the preparation of applications for internships. Universities should also assist by distributing advertisements to students.
- 1.11. Universities should work with the South African Pharmacy Council (SAPC) on informing the profession in time of the expected number of graduates each year, to allow for preparation for the uptake of increased numbers of interns expected the following year.
- 1.12. SAPC should look to changing the ratio of 1 intern to 1 tutor so that tutors may have more than one intern.
- 1.13. SAPC registration fees for facilities and tutors together with the registration process and compulsory inspections of facilities contributed to pharmacists not willing to offer internship.
- 1.14. The Provincial Departments of Health (PDoH) together with the National Department of Health (NDoH) should ensure and secure sufficient and transparent funding to employ pharmacy interns in public hospital and institutions.
- 1.15. PSSA should host webinars to assist student members with the compilation of a Curriculum Vitae (CV) and in addition, provide advice on preparing for interviews.

## 2. Letter to SAPC (Action 2)

A letter to the Registrar of SAPC on 5 February 2018 brought the following to his attention:

- 2.1. SAPC should consider changing the current ratio of 1 intern to 1 tutor so that tutors may have more than one intern as it will allow more pharmacist interns to be accommodated by current tutors in pharmacies with the capacity to employ additional staff (*addressing recommendation 1.12*). At a stakeholders meeting at the end of 2019, SAPC informed stakeholders of the implementation of Regulation 16(2)(a) of the Regulations relating to pharmacy education and training stating that *a tutor practising in a pharmacy in which other pharmacists practise on a full-time basis may act as tutor to more than one pharmacist intern, in which event he or she must delegate the actual practical training of all such additional pharmacist interns to such other pharmacists given certain circumstances. A fee was also included for a delegated pharmacist for the delegation of a pharmacist intern training by an approved tutor as from 2020.*
- 2.2. The registration fees for facilities and tutors should be reconsidered in light of the need for more intern training sites and the registration process should be streamlined and expedited (*addressing recommendation 1.13*).
- 2.3. SAPC should play a more active role in working with universities to inform the profession of the expected number of graduates annually so that the profession can prepare accordingly (*addressing recommendation 1.11*).
- 2.4. Prior to amendment of the Pharmacy Act by Act 88 of 1997, section 20 (2) stated that a pharmacist intern would be deemed to be a pharmacist during the twelfth month of internship. This was often an incentive to employ an intern as the tutor would then have a replacement should he or she choose to take leave during the twelfth month of internship.

- 2.5. This possibility should be reconsidered as a way to incentivise pharmacists to employ interns *(supporting recommendation 1.3 and aligned with recommendation 13.5)*.

### **3. Letter to NDoH (Action 3)**

A letter to the Minister of Health on 5 February 2018 requested that:

- 3.1. NDoH and the provincial Departments of Health ensure and secure sufficient and transparent funding to employ pharmacist interns in public hospitals and institutions. It is critical for the future of pharmacy, the sustained supply of the pharmacy workforce and the delivery of healthcare to South African citizens that all pharmacy graduates have the opportunity to enter into internship at those facilities that can benefit from their services. While budgeting may be considered primarily to be a provincial issue, the PSSA believes that it is important for both the Minister of Health and the NDoH to support the provinces in the resolution of this situation *(addressing recommendation 1.14)*.

### **4. Webinar to final year pharmacy student members on CV and interview skills (Action 4)**

A webinar was hosted on 19 April 2018 for final year pharmacy student members of PSSA *(addressing recommendation 1.15)*. A total of 51 students attended the webinar. The webinar addressed the following objectives:

- Understanding the basic layout for a Curriculum Vitae (CV);
- Knowing what should be included in a CV cover letter;
- Identifying behaviours that could negatively impact on interview performance; and
- Thinking of alternative ways of answering interview questions.

The post-webinar survey (n=28) provided the following feedback:

- 4.1. The webinar increased their understanding of the basic layout of a CV (n=27).
- 4.2. Majority of participants (n=16) were aware prior to this webinar, that they should include a formal cover letter with their Curriculum Vitae (CV).
- 4.3. Behavioural mistakes that were identified by students as those that they would have made in an interview prior to this webinar included:
- 4.3.1. Not knowing yourself, the company or the job well enough
  - 4.3.2. Freaking out when caught off-guard with a surprise/unexpected question or scenario
  - 4.3.3. Using inappropriate, non-work-related examples
  - 4.3.4. Unfavourable body language
  - 4.3.5. Using informal language in a formal situation
  - 4.3.6. Using a cell phone during interview or only placing it to vibration
  - 4.3.7. Clothing and appearance

Participants rated the webinar 4.07 out of 5 in terms of how well it prepared them for standing a better chance of being successful in an upcoming interview.

Towards the end of 2018, although to a lesser extent, a similar situation was experienced. Eighty-eight names of graduates without internship were collected. Of these graduates, some graduated in 2017 and a year later were still without internship employment.

### **5. Collaboration with pharmaceutical recruitment company (Action 5)**

PSSA partnership with a pharmaceutical recruitment company (owned by a pharmacist who is also a member of the Society) for 2019. Services offered by the company were shared with the unemployed graduates as a possible avenue for them to explore. Services included assistance with

cover letter and CV writing, advertising their CV to prospective employers registered on the recruitment company's network, preparing graduates for the interview, and assisting with reference checks to speed up the hiring process with a prospective employer.

5.1 The availability of these services was distributed to the unemployed graduates for their consideration (*supporting recommendation 1.15*).

The need for continuing this partnership will be assessed year by year depending on queries and need expressed by graduates.

## **6. Circulation of the list of graduates to PSSA members (Action 6)**

The list of graduates without internship was communicated to PSSA members by means of official Newsletters on 10 January 2019 (Newsletter #2/2019) and again on 27 March 2019 (Newsletter #11/2019).

6.1 Members who still had vacancies were requested to contact graduates whose names appeared on these lists to request CVs and/or arrange for interviews (*addressing recommendation 1.8*).

## **7. SAPC statistic information for internship project (Action 7)**

PSSA requested statistics from SAPC on 22 February 2019 to inform the current situation on employment opportunities for graduates and also to allow PSSA to start planning for the potential of being in a similar situation towards the end of 2019. Data at the time indicated that:

- a total of 1846 pharmacies had active premises approvals for training of interns;
- a total of 2758 pharmacists were approved to act as tutors for interns; and
- a total of 553 BPharm IV pharmacy students were on the register of Council (*although this was official data received from SAPC, this figure does not correlate with the number of 2020 interns of 1073*).

From this data, it was clear that:

7.1 There are sufficient numbers of registered facilities and tutors for the number of graduates expected annually. The current intern crisis could therefore not be due to a lack of facilities or tutor registration (*supporting recommendation 1.11*).

## **8. Health and Welfare SETA (Action 8 & 9)**

After many attempts, there was no progress in hosting a webinar with the HW SETA to inform PSSA members on how to access funding from the SETA to employ interns. However, actions to offer information and support to members included (*addressing recommendation 1.9*):

8.1 Information communicated to members on the available expression of interest for funding that was open for 2019/2020 in Newsletter #21/2019.

8.2 In October 2019, the Southern Gauteng Branch of SAACP hosted a CPD event with the topic "Funding for WBL and additional funding for pharmacy personnel". This event was hosted by a project manager of the HW SETA.

8.3 A working group of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the PSSA is compiling a SOP document for members to assist in the process of securing access funding from the HW SETA.

## **9. Webinar to final-year pharmacy students on how to prepare for internship (Action 10)**

Another webinar was hosted for the 2019 final year pharmacy students on 14 June, building on the previous webinar hosted in 2018. The objectives for this webinar were:

- Understand the basic elements of applying for an internship;

- Know what your responsibility in the process is;
- Identify potential barriers or obstacles in the application process; and
- Think of alternative places to apply for internship in case of not being successful.

This webinar was conducted with three pharmacists who are part of the process of employing or recruiting interns from both the community and hospital environment.

During the registration process for this webinar, final-years students had to indicate in which sector they would like to perform their internship. The majority of registrants indicated that they would like to conduct their internship in a public hospital. During the webinar, the number of registered pharmacies per sector, as obtained from the SAPC website, was shared with students to bring to their attention the fact that there are limited public hospital pharmacies with intern posts and that this may be a reason why so many graduates do not successfully secure internship positions when applying during their final year of study. It was recommended during this webinar that:

- 9.1 Students should apply to a variety of facilities for internship and not only to one sector such as public hospitals (*addressing recommendation 1.5*), and
- 9.2 Students should keep track of their applications, the due dates for receipt of applications, when feedback on applications can be expected, by when an unsuccessful application is evident, and to follow-up when no feedback is received (*addressing recommendation 1.6*).

During the webinar, a poll was conducted to determine how many attendees had already secured an internship for 2020. It was a shock to find that out of the 74 attendees, no one had a confirmed internship position and only one was currently in discussion re a position. It was recommended by the presenters in the webinar that:

- 9.3 Interns should start with the process of finding employment at least 6 to 8 months before commencement of internship. The reasoning behind hosting the webinar before the June/July university recess was to allow interns to use the new knowledge gained during the webinar in their attempts to find internships.

This information resulted in concluding the following recommendation:

- 9.4 PSSA should follow-up with the nine pharmacy schools to monitor the progress of final-year students in securing internship positions during the second semester of their final year. This will also bring the reality of the situation to the attention of the University.

Other information shared during the webinar include:

- 9.5 Students were reminded that one of the basic elements of applying for an internship is to highlight to the potential employer what you are able to offer the pharmacy (*addressing recommendation 1.2*). Students should keep in mind that a BPharm degree only does not set the individual apart from other applicants.
- 9.6 Interns should have the intention to learn everything possible about their profession (*addressing recommendation 1.4*).
- 9.7 Students should take their pre-graduate work in pharmacies more seriously and indicate their intention to conduct their internship at the same facility where they work during their 400 hours as undergraduate students (*addressing recommendation 1.1*). In this manner, the owner/manager does not have to re-invest resources in a new intern if it has been done already for a pharmacy student.
- 9.8 Students with bursaries, whether public or private sector, should indicate this on their internship applications when applying for internship (*addressing recommendation 1.7*).

## **10. Involving Schools of Pharmacy in monitoring internship employment (Action 11)**

In July 2019, the PSSA requested Directors of the nine Schools of Pharmacy to participate in recording the status of secured internships by their final-year students. Directors were requested to

record the number of BPharm IV students who had secured an internship position for 2020. The recording was by confirmation of written proof of a successful appointment as a pharmacist intern for 2020 during July and October 2019.

- 10.1 The involvement of universities in assisting final year students with employment seeking, application processes, curriculum vitae and interview skills is highly recommended. Where possible, university resources should be utilized to assist students in developing the required skills to be able to source vacancies (*addressing recommendation 1.10*).

Participation from five of the nine Schools representing 519 students was received.

- 10.2 During July 2019, three Schools reported that in total only 27 students had secured internship positions for 2020 and during October 2019 only 54 students had secured intern positions (*addressing resolution 9.5*).

Reasons that were provided by universities for the low participation was that July was too early to collect data. This was regardless of the advice provided during the Webinar that the application process for employment should start 6 to 8 months before employment and regardless the fact that the limited time remaining for the academic year limited opportunity for students to seek employment in/close to home towns. Hopefully participation in this exercise opened the eyes of School management teams as to the role they have in ensuring their graduates are employed.

### **11. Circulation of internship vacancies to students (Action 12)**

The call for applications for internship as received from provincial Departments of Health, private hospital groups and industry was circulated on various platforms to PSSA student members. This represented a minimum of 270 internship positions and did not include any offers from community pharmacies.

### **12. PSSA statement on internship (Action 13)**

The National Executive Committee (NEC) of the PSSA, under the leadership of the Deputy President, developed and approved a statement on internship, community service, bursary holders and foreign students. Regarding students the following aspects were highlighted:

- 12.1 apply for internship well in advance and do not wait until the end of the year preceding internship (*addressing recommendation 9.3*);
- 12.2 communicate any potential delays in completion of studies with prospective employers as soon as possible;
- 12.3 the role of the PSSA is not to find internship positions for members nor does the PSSA have the primary responsibility to ensure sufficient positions for interns;
- 12.4 PSSA commits to assist final-year pharmacy student members and graduates without internship with CV and interview skills training, to encourage members to register facilities and tutors with SAPC, to support members to access funding opportunities, to support graduates without internship with advice and to point to advertisements when received; and
- 12.5 National and provincial Departments of Health do not have a contractual obligation to place interns due to limited positions and funding. PSSA can advocate for the allocation of more funding towards pharmacy internships (*addressing recommendation 1.14 as done in action 3.1*).

### **13. Tutor survey (Action 14)**

During August 2019, a survey was conducted for the purpose of understanding reasons why registered pharmacists accept or decline to act as tutors for pharmacist interns. The need for this survey originated from the data received from Council indicating sufficient numbers of tutors and

training facilities, regardless the current trend of graduates being unsuccessful in securing internship positions (see point 7). The following recommendations resulted from the survey:

- 13.1 Salary packages should be more realistic and market related across sectors and geographical areas and could result in creating more positions.
- 13.2 Funding from HW SETA should be sourced to subsidise the salary packages of interns (*aligned with recommendation 1.9 and actions 8.1 to 8.3*).
- 13.3 The registration process at SAPC should be expedited to avoid volunteers being demotivated to act as tutors and fees for registration of facilities and tutors must be subsidised (*aligned with recommendation 1.13 and action 2.2*).
- 13.4 Interns should avoid limiting applications for internship to only cities and metros or only one sector of pharmacy, as there are pharmacies in local communities who have internship positions available (*aligned with recommendation 1.5 and action 9.1*).
- 13.5 With reference to recommendation 2.4 as included in the letter to the SAPC, it was interesting to find that only 35% of participants in the tutor survey indicated that the fact that the intern be allowed to work as a qualified pharmacist in the 12<sup>th</sup> month of internship, enabling the tutor to take leave, would be one of their top three reasons for choosing to tutor pharmacist interns. This recommendation will thus not be pursued further given the low interest from tutors.

The report on the tutor survey was circulated to members in Newsletter #30/2019.

Towards the end of 2019, a significantly reduced number of graduates indicated that they were not yet successful in securing an internship for 2020.

#### **14. Comprehensive survey on graduates without internship (Action 15)**

During both 2017/2018 and 2018/2019, the only details of graduates without internship collected were name, contact details and preferred province and/or willingness to relocate. For 2019/2020, the PSSA compiled a comprehensive questionnaire using SurveyMonkey which could be circulate to potential employers and which contained additional details on the candidates to assist employers to find suitable candidate(s) for interviews and/or appointment(s). To date, 33 graduates have completed the survey indicating that they are without internship. From the entries made by graduates without internship the following conclusions can be made:

- 14.1 Regardless of the warnings mentioned during the 2019 Webinar, the majority of graduates without internship still prefer public hospitals for internship.
- 14.2 The academic average for these graduates without internship is between 55% and 65%.
- 14.3 Formal leadership participation during BPharm studies are lacking.
- 14.4 Reasons offered for being without internship are still mostly externalized (citizenship, too many graduates, no feedback) and seldom internalized (lack of connections, lack of skill to sell oneself).
- 14.5 Lack of consistency in answers provided e.g. will not indicate any involvement in leadership during studies but will list leadership skills as part of skill set to potential employers.

The following recommendation can be made to applicants:

- 14.6 Graduates lack a reality check that includes (1) a degree is not a guarantee of employment, (2) rules are not there to 'force you to lie', (3) non-citizens should not apply at public institutions, (4) academic performance should be prioritized, (5) work experience and skills development are critical elements for employers, and (6) you need to be better than what you are today.

## 15. Circulation of the list of graduates to PSSA members (Action 16)

The list of graduates without internship was communicated to PSSA members through official newsletters on 10 January 2019 (Newsletter #46/2019).

- 15.1 Members who still had vacancies were requested to contact graduates whose names appeared on these lists to request CVs and/or interviews *(aligned with recommendation 1.8)*.

## 16. HW SETA Regional Workshops 2020 (Action 17)

Notification of the nationwide regional workshops hosted by the HW SETA to assist employers with the 2020 Workplace Skills Plan (WSP) and Annual Training Report (ATR) which is due by 30 April each year. Workshops took place during January and February 2020 *(aligned with recommendation 1.9)*.

### Conclusion:

During the past two years, PSSA initiated 16 actions with 19 recommendations to address the internship crisis. We believe that the reduction in the number of graduates without internship over the two years can be attributed to the broad and continuous approach in addressing the crisis. Only two recommendations have not been addressed yet, of which the one will be addressed later in 2020 (14.6) and the other might not be within the powers of the PSSA to address although a trend in this regard is already observed in practice (13.1). Seven actions will be maintained in 2020 and the number of graduates without internship to be forwarded at the end of 2020 will provide further evidence of the impact of the actions in this regard.

<b>Actions 2017-2020</b>	<b>Actions to be repeated annually as needed</b>
Internship Placement Survey	
Letter to SAPC	
Letter to NDoH	
Webinars to final year pharmacy student members	•
Collaboration with pharmaceutical recruitment company	•
Circulation of the list of names of unemployed graduates to PSSA members	•
SAPC statistical information for internship project	
Health and Welfare SETA collaboration	•
Involving Schools of Pharmacy in monitoring internship employment	•
Circulation of internship vacancies to students	•
PSSA statement on internship	
Tutor survey	
Comprehensive survey on graduates without internship	•

End.