



FOR PROFESSIONALS

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## **SA PHARMACISTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS RETAIL PHARMACY CHANGES – PPS SURVEY REVEALS**

*30 September 2014:* Attitudes towards the growth of large retail pharmacy chains in South Africa are changing amongst pharmacy professionals, according to a survey conducted by PPS.

The results of the second quarter PPS Profession Confidence Index survey of over 120 pharmacists reveal that attitudes towards the expansion of pharmacies in large retail businesses are steadily changing. Compared to the first quarter of 2014, the survey revealed a massive 24 percentage point drop to 54% when the respondents were asked whether they felt threatened by the expanse of pharmacies in large retail stores.

Ivan Kotzé, Executive Director of the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa, points out that it is possible that there is a shift as a result of the recently published new criteria for granting of pharmacy licences. “If these are fairly and consistently applied, they should not be a threat to independently owned pharmacies.”

Gerhard Joubert, Executive Head: Group Marketing & Stakeholder Relations at PPS, says that the industry is working hard to change the perceptions of pharmacy professionals, as well as improve the environment in which they work. “This is evident by the shift in the results of the survey when compared to previous quarters.”

This was further supported by a 22 percentage point drop to 62% from the first quarter in 2014 when pharmacists were asked whether they were concerned about the impact that discounts in large stores will have on their business.

“The discounts on prescription medicines in bigger stores, when calculated as a rand value, are minimal as the discount can only apply to the dispensing fee component of the price,” explains Kotzé. “As a result, the public may be starting to realise the convenience aspect of approaching their local pharmacy of choice, rather than hunting down discount stores in an effort to save money.”

Perceptions on the future of the healthcare system in South Africa over the next five years are also steadily changing. The results of the survey showed a 4 percentage point increase, to a 50% confidence level within the pharmacy sector when respondents were asked about the future of the local healthcare system.

Kotzé says that the initial perceptions about the future of the healthcare system in South Africa were based on unsubstantiated facts reported in the media. “Now it appears that the perception is formed on the basis of facts, which indicate that the Department of Health’s focus is to improve the public sector standards as the first priority, before introducing National Health Insurance, which minimises the perceived threat.”

Other results of the survey showed that 79% of the respondents believed the abuse of over the counter drugs is prevalent in South Africa.

Kotzé says that in an effort to address this, the Community Pharmacy Sector is in the process of introducing a system that will alert pharmacists if excessive quantities of products with abuse potential have been recently purchased from other suppliers. “The project is currently on a pilot phase. The first medicine to be identified is codeine, but the project will be expanded at a later stage to include other medicines.”

When asked on how confident they were that self-medication by South African consumers is effectively supervised, the survey showed a 57% confidence level.

Kotzé points out that consumers have the right and the obligation to discuss the use of any medicine with a pharmacist, whether it is self-medication or on prescription. “Unfortunately, many consumers do not consult with the pharmacist to assist them to make sense of the abundance of information, which is not always correct.”

He adds that the problem of ineffective supervision arises particularly with unscheduled medicines that are freely available from normal retail stores. “A product that appears to be safe and effective may in fact be potentially dangerous, particularly if taken in combination with other products. Many of these products have not been registered as medicines, although the Medicines Control Council is in the process of implementing new legislation, which will alleviate this problem,” concludes Kotzé.