



for professionals

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PHARMACIST

5 September 2011: Every year thousands of South African consumers visit pharmacies for over-the-counter solutions to general ailments such as colds, flu or allergic reactions; but many are unsure whether it is more appropriate to seek the advice of a pharmacist or if they should in fact actually be seeing a doctor.

According to Dr Dominique Stott, Executive of Medical Standards and Services at PPS, the specialist financial services provider to graduate professionals, there are a few key factors that consumers should be aware of when consulting a pharmacist.

“By law, pharmacists and pharmacist’s assistants are required to wear a name badge clearly displaying their title and qualifications. Certificates of their qualifications and compulsory registration with the South African Pharmacy Council (SAPC) should also be displayed in visible locations within the pharmacy. If these are not displayed, consumers have the right to ask for proof of registration with the SAPC.”

Dr Stott says that consumers should understand that medicines might not be effective, or can sometimes have severe side effects, if not taken correctly. “The pharmacist should clearly explain the various medicinal and therapeutic options and side effects of treatment available to the patient. A good pharmacist will also spend time with the patient and display good communication skills by listening to the problem and asking questions in order to determine whether the condition can be treated with medicines that do not require a prescription.”

Lorraine Osman, head of public affairs at the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa, says consumers are often unsure if a symptom is serious enough to warrant seeing a doctor and encourages consumers to ask their pharmacist. “Pharmacists are able to advise customers as to whether it is necessary to see the doctor. Some conditions require accurate diagnosis with special tests e.g. blood tests in order for the correct medicine to be prescribed, while others may need ongoing monitoring by a doctor.”

Osman says that while dispensing remains a critically important function of pharmacists, they are also able to offer screening and monitoring tests. “In this way, consumers who are at risk of disease may be identified and referred to their doctors for follow up. These tests include monitoring of blood glucose levels and blood cholesterol levels, as well as blood pressure.”

Dr Stott says for cases in which a quick diagnosis can be made, consumers can consult a pharmacist to save time and money.

“It is also a good idea to frequent the same pharmacy as this allows the pharmacist to notice if an unusual pattern of ill health begins to emerge. In that way, the pharmacist can also direct the patient to seek more specific medical help,” concludes Dr Stott.