

# Editor's comment

## Maturity brings accountability

A fairly significant anniversary slipped by unnoticed this year: What started as the *South African Journal for Continuing Medical Education* in 1983, now abbreviated to *CME*, has entered its 21st year of publication.

The age of 21 is significant in human growth and development, as it brings with it an assumption of maturity, and the legal status of accountability for one's actions. But can one equate the responsibilities of a journal with those of a person? Let's try.

Among the qualities one expects of an ethical human being and a journal, are honesty, integrity, credibility and a mature attitude to life and to other inhabitants of our planet. These should extend in humans to such areas as health, driving, and HIV/AIDS. This issue of *CME* covers the topic of over-the-counter (OTC) medications, and one assumes that ill people will accept a certain amount of responsibility for their own health. This requires a degree of maturity on the part of patients, in that, for example, they should divulge to the pharmacist any other medication that they are currently taking. The addition of an OTC to a patient's treatment regimen either may negate the effects of other medicines, or interact adversely with them, to the detriment of the patient's health. The patient should not abrogate this responsibility.

The appalling road mortality figures for the 2002/3 holiday season bring home the need for a mature attitude among drivers. We have all too frequently heard the adage that a motor vehicle is a weapon which must be handled carefully. Yet there are so many individuals who eschew even normal everyday courtesy when put behind the steering wheel of a motor vehicle. There is no doubt that while the Minister of Transport, the traffic control authorities and the Arrive Alive campaign do play a part, it is the motorist — or as a colloqui-

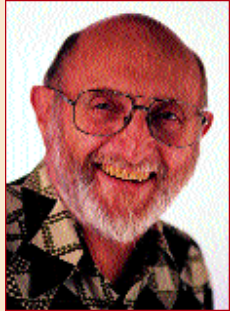
alism would have it, the 'nut that holds the wheel' — who plays the greatest part in motor accidents and the road mortality statistics. Reduction of these numbers requires a mature attitude, which many either do not have, or are not willing to practise. The major component, in my opinion and which many authorities support, is speed. And how can one expect the relatively uneducated driver to reduce speed, when our Minister of Finance, and an MEC in the Eastern Cape, were trapped doing well over the speed limit? Where is the maturity?

The HIV/AIDS pandemic will not be curtailed until a responsible, mature attitude to sex is exhibited and safer sex is practised universally. The likelihood either of a preventive or therapeutic vaccine is still a long way off, and until then, the only recourse we have is to try to instil an informed, sensible and reliable attitude in the younger people of South Africa — a difficult job indeed considering the diverse ethnicity of our society. The inclusion in January by our Minister of Health of a known denialist in the list of speakers at the SADC conference, speaks volumes about the lack of maturity in the Minister's actions. The vacillation between acceptance of the weight of science and the views of dissidents, belies the maturity necessary to make an informed decision and stick to it.

Many of the problems in our society revolve around a maturity which, it appears, our society still has to reach.

Going back to *CME*, we hope that during our adolescent years we have fulfilled a need in the medical community, and that now that we are reaching adulthood, we will have the maturity to provide ever more valuable practical information for the family physicians in our community.

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