

South Africa appears, unfortunately, to be gradually evolving towards a situation where increasingly authoritarian and sometimes almost draconian approaches are being used to achieve somewhat ill-defined or dubious goals. (This is not perhaps unexpected in relatively young democracies like South Africa where ideas of true freedom and personal liberty are not yet all that firmly entrenched despite claims by some to the contrary.) We can see this disturbing loss of liberty in South Africa, for example, in subtle and more obvious attempts recently to intimidate the judiciary and the general press or television media and this trend is getting worse as conflict in the ruling party grows and general elections rapidly approach. Legislation is being prepared and presented to various bodies including Parliament that seems to be quite likely to clash with the constitution of the country and voices and comments are becoming obvious in various media arguing against some of these legal documents or proposed changes. We can expect a flurry of legislative challenges in the near future as increasingly values clash. Closer to home, bodies such as the HPCSA are changing rapidly such that it is perhaps time that this body becomes completely separate from the health care professions themselves and is funded directly and purely via the taxpayer. If the major purpose of the HPCSA is to protect the public then surely the pub-

lic should be its primary supporter and health professionals in many fields will have to take a more independent and hopefully proactive role and where necessary use mechanisms such as negotiation, lobbying and possibly, as the last resort, the legal and judicial system to protect their specific rights and interests. Perhaps a new administrative, independent and legal body needs to be formed by the various health care professions to more specifically promote and protect their interests with the focus of the HPCSA being more about those interests of the public which these health care professions serve. But a carefully considered debate as to the current approach and role of the HPCSA seems necessary; otherwise matters could easily lead to a generally unsatisfactory situation that could create unreasonable demands on health care professionals further encouraging immigration and probably diminishing interest and entry by young people into the different health professions. Why would sensible young people want to study health-related fields where the rewards and overall career satisfaction may be small or inadequate and this not only refers to the potential monetary ones? If external pressures and unnecessary or perhaps ill-advised interference from bodies such as the government and HPCSA becomes too excessive, unfair or even punitive in nature then this will most likely prove to be highly counter-productive for all. Per-



haps, our government will eventually coerce or force young people to study specific fields where there are perceived or real shortages; an unfortunate process that already occurs in some more repressive parts of the world and where this method of coercion appears to work or so its' proponents claim. But this apparent success is generally superficial and eventually such methods fail to achieve their goals and this becomes obvious in that such approaches inevitably lead to lower standards and generally less productivity and enthusiasm from prospective students and academics in tertiary education. Generally lack of free choice has negative and sometimes serious effects in many areas in such societies and mostly corruption is strongly facilitated. It seems to me that societies are most creative and effective and people happiest where freedom of choice and activity is highly respected and protected by all citizens and by the governments involved. But, as the cliché goes, governments and organizing bodies when given too much power tend to corrupt absolutely. And, where democracies do not exist usually little except disobedience of sorts and conflict becomes necessary to produce the required change to create better and freer societies.

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