Psychiatrists as Change-Agents
For the 5th consecutive year, SASOP and the Public Sector Group participated in Dr Reddy’s Academic Weekend (15-17 May 2015).

The focus this year included preparation to showcase SASOP and the Public Sector Group at the 2016 World Psychiatric Association International Congress (WPAIC) scheduled to be held in Cape Town next year. The accent fell on Psychiatrists as a group, and as individuals, as agents of change.

Psychiatry and its Social Contract was a key component of the agenda. Dr Mvuyiso Talatala, (SASOP President: 2014 – 2016) believes Psychiatry’s contract with the society it serves is an integral part of the build up to WPAIC. Because SASOP is evolving in how it interacts with stakeholders and society, the annual Dr Reddy’s Academic Weekend was an opportunity for public sector psychiatrists to engage and explore how psychiatry is contracted to the community it serves.

Psychiatry in Society was discussed in terms of the public perception of the Psychiatrist – as a Quack, Shrink or Relic, and how they are represented in the movies and portrayed in popular media. The question remains: is a Psychiatrist a respected physician or still the modern-day equivalent of the soothsayer?

More practical issues also held the platform where the impact of technology on psychiatry, the business of psychiatry and the psychiatrist and the law were explored.

Prof J Burns concluded the weekend meeting with thoughts on the psychiatrist as parent. The prestigious panel of presenters also included Dr I Westmore, Prof B Janse van Rensburg, Dr M West, Dr L Roberston, Dr M Motlana, Dr J Parker, Prof Seedat and his Panel, Dr V Maharaj, Dr I Chetty and Dr E Allers.

Dr Talatala, although not present at the meeting in person, expressed his wish that ‘whenever an opinion of South African psychiatry is requested, it be answered by SASOP, speaking with one voice’. He believes that the key to a stronger mental health team, and to the destigmatisation of mental illness, is a stronger SASOP.

Delegates invited to this meeting included Public Sector Psychiatrists elected by Subgroups, as well as Private Psychiatrists invited by Dr Reddy’s. While the weekend provided an occasion for SASOP members to meet colleagues and friends and to enjoy the rare opportunity to be out of their daily practice, it also offered public sector psychiatrists a forum for introspection and rejuvenation to take SASOP, and Pubsec in particular, to greater heights.