



might fail to achieve therapeutic levels while facing a negligible toxicity risk.

Pepper said work on the human genome would take far longer, 'because we don't yet know enough about the metabolism of antiretrovirals'.

Meanwhile Roche's AmpliChip CYP450 test, which analyses variations in two genes that play a major role in the metabolism of almost half of all drugs currently on the market, received the CE mark ('Conformité Européenne'), allowing the test to be used for diagnostic purposes in the European Union.

The test detects genetic variations in the cytochrome P450 2D6 and 2C19 genes and provides the associated predictive phenotype (poor, intermediate, extensive, or ultra-rapid metaboliser). Results can be used by physicians as an aid for selecting drugs and individualising treatment doses for drugs primarily metabolised by the enzymes these genes encode.

Roche Diagnostics chief, Heino von Prondzynski, described the test as the first representative of an exciting new technology that held great potential for diagnostic applications.

The AmpliChip CYP450 test uses two industry gold standards, Roche polymerase chain reaction (PCR) amplification technology and Affymetrix high-density microarray technology (glass chips arrayed with tens of thousands of DNA fragments yet no bigger than a thumbnail). The latter's GeneChip System 3000Dx instrumentation, on which the AmpliChip is run, has also been CE marked.

Enzymes encoded by the CYP2D6 gene metabolise many antidepressants, antipsychotics, anti-arrhythmics, pain drugs, antiemetics, and beta-blockers (beta-adrenergic receptor blocker drugs). Enzymes encoded by the CYP2C19 gene metabolise drugs from a variety of classes, including anticonvulsants, proton pump

inhibitors, anticoagulants, benzodiazepines, and antimalarials.

With AIDS, this new technology may only be useful for assessing the genetics of the patient's ability to metabolise antiretrovirals and other drugs used in the treatment of this disease.

Pepper said one indication of the 'Machiavellian nature' of HIV/AIDS, was that the virus mutated at a rate that was too quick for AmpliChip technology to be of use. The Chips were updated every 2 years, which did not allow for new mutations to be included in a timely manner. He said other molecular techniques that could be adapted in a very short space of time to detect for novel mutations, would have to be used.

*Pepper is a holder of the Walter Johnson award for post-doctoral research in cell biology (1974) and the prestigious Denber Pinard award for his Privat Docent Thesis (1977).*

**Chris Bateman**

## SHOT IN THE ARM FOR SAMA PUBLISHING



*SAMA Secretary General, Dr Moji Mogare, signs the new HMPG deal with Cape Media founder, Andrew Fehrsen.*

The departure of Peter Roberts, head of our Health and Medical Publishing Group (HMPG) this December after 20 years of forging it into a highly

successful operation has become the catalyst for an exciting and creative realignment.

The core business of the HMPG is to produce 17 periodic medical publications in about 100 editions annually with content generation by a highly skilled and experienced editorial team. This team will remain directly accountable to the South African Medical Association (SAMA).

However, with some lateral thinking, a deal has emerged in which the HMPG business team (production, marketing, advertising, distribution) will partner Andrew Fehrsen, founder and MD of one of the country's largest business publishing houses, Cape Media.

Replacing institutional memory and specialist hands-on ability like that which Roberts has was never going to

be an easy task, yet the current deal will open even more doors and optimise the HMPG operation.

Fehrsen, who has created over 100 jobs in Cape Media over the past 6 years, said at a ceremony to sign the



*Cape Media founder and new HMPG partner, Andrew Fehrsen, with Deputy Editor of the SAMJ, Professor JP van Niekerk.*



new deal, 'what makes this such a pleasure is that the staff have been so open to change and actually embraced it after being fully informed'.

Dr Moji Mogare, secretary general of SAMA, said that even before Roberts gave notice of his leaving, the SAMA board had asked him (Mogare) to oversee the transformation of the HMPG

into an independent business unit.

Mogare, who becomes the executive director of HMPG, working closely with Professor Ralph Kirsch and the Publications Committee, said the deal, which became effective on 1 January would 'unlock value' in the HMPG staff. 'This partnership will optimise the operation here. Andrew is well known

and respected in the publishing industry and it will open doors for us,' he said.

The Publications Committee will constitute the interim board of HMPG until SAMA's national council meeting in July decides on what its new mandate will be.

**Chris Bateman**

## FAREWELL TO PETER ROBERTS



*Outgoing head of HMPG, Peter Roberts*

Peter Roberts, Publisher and Head of the Health and Medical and Publishing Group (HMPG) takes leave of us at the end of January 2005 to join his wife who has settled in the UK. SAMA has been fortunate in having a leader with his expertise and dedication for 25 years in its publishing enterprise.

Peter had 10 years of experience in various publishing activities before joining the Medical Association as Advertising Manager in 1979. In this capacity he launched the *CME* journal, developed new marketing strategies and

opened a marketing office in Johannesburg, resulting in sales increases. In 1985 he was appointed Publications Manager and in 1992 was appointed to his present position.

As Head of the publishing operations Peter has been responsible for an enterprise that has grown in size and in stature. There are currently 27 staff members producing 17 successful periodicals published in some 100 editions each year. Among many achievements Peter initiated, commissioned and launched the *South African Medicines Formulary*, conceptualised and developed South Africa's most popular CPD programme, initiated and established the successful mail-order book sales outlet and considerably expanded other new business.

Without Peter's initiative and drive to develop the business of publishing, the Medical Association would have found itself in major financial difficulties. For the past 3 years Peter has worked tirelessly towards establishing a sounder and more viable independent business unit for the publishing group. This has culminated in the agreements reported elsewhere in this issue of the *SAMJ*. His sacrifices in remaining with the HMPG until succession plans were properly developed were typical of his loyalty to SAMA.

While these achievements are readily visible, his contribution to staff development and their satisfaction are equally important. Publishing entails a delicate balance between the demands of the market and the editorial content, which are not always compatible. Peter's relationship with the editors has been a winning combination of mutual respect and cooperation.

For family reasons, Peter and his wife Cathy are going to settle in the UK for the foreseeable future, and we wish him and Cathy all the very best in their new life together.

**Dan Ncayiyana, JP van Niekerk**