traditional healers interpret their clients’ behaviour and significant experiences in the context of relationships with the ancestors, or of bewitchment. Their interpretation is intuitive, rather than being based on phenomenological or physiological evidence of dysfunction. Apart from homeopathic medications prescribed, they operate largely in the spiritual and existential sphere. With regard to medications, they do not generally apply the natural sciences to their art, such as monitoring doses and side-effects, although this may be changing. Therefore, they would seem to resemble faith-based practitioners and counsellors more than medical practitioners. This is the major conclusion drawn from the data obtained in these three studies.

Conclusion
The implications for collaboration between mental health practitioners and traditional healers are significant. While collaboration should be promoted, as between all members of the multi-disciplinary mental health team, there is little evidence from these studies to support collaboration between the two groups as fully-fledged medical partners. While it may be necessary for the medications used by traditional healers to be subject to the requirements of the Medicines Control Council, is it appropriate that their costs, unlike other homeopathic medications, are reimbursed by medical aid schemes? When traditional healers are registered with the Health Professions Council, will they, but not ministers of religion, feel entitled to request patients’ confidential information from mental health practitioners?

Collaboration with traditional healers should urgently be promoted, as they are clearly providing a significant mental health service to certain sectors of the population. However, much more knowledge needs to be gained, widely shared, and debated, about how traditional healers practice, and what form of collaboration would be most appropriate. To proceed in any other way, would be a disservice to our clients and to the health profession generally.

References
1. Cape Argus, 29 September 2004. The Impact of Traditional Healers Bill