

Editorial

2012 has been an eventful year. Ongoing efforts to broaden the research profile of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery at the University of Malta, as well as the increasing numbers of both Maltese and international students enrolled at the Medical School mandated an increasing level of commitment of both human and financial resources. We have also seen the implementation of a number of curriculum changes aiming to further streamline course content and delivery. The impact of these changes on students' knowledge base and on the acquisition of core skills and competences as well as the longterm social and economic impact of these developments on graduates and the community remains to be seen. Ultimately the aim of change is to continue to improve standards in healthcare and patient-centred medical practice. Audit and research are essential to this process as is the eventual dissemination of the data and outcomes of such audits and studies.

In this issue of the Malta Medical Journal, a broad range of papers tackle issues relevant to both medical practice and society. The prevalence of obesity over the years and the process and outcomes of screening for obesity in a paediatric clinic are topical issues intended to raise awareness as is the paper on the use of cannabis and on Hepatitis. Dementia continues to be a matter of great concern for healthcare providers, and the relatives of those afflicted by this condition which leads to increasing dependence of those affected on those around them and on their eventual need for institutionalized care. The need for further research to develop therapeutic options which can ameliorate or at least arrest the progression of this condition is clear. However, the response to therapy is not dependent solely on the underlying pathology but also on the genetic makeup of the individual which can determine the response to a particular medication. Pharmacogenomics represents a relatively new and fascinating research area that is reviewed in this issue of MMJ. The ethical and legal issues that can be faced by medical practitioners in treating adolescents is the subject of an important pilot study that highlights the

fact that subjects in this age group may refrain from discussing important health concerns in the presence of their parents and the legal obligation to obtain parental or guardian consent in caring for these young patients. A number of interesting and informative case reports are also included in this issue of the Journal which emphasise that whilst research is important for the development of new diagnostic and therapeutic modalities, as well as to highlight areas of medical practice that need further development, ultimately the delivery of health care must target individual patients' differing needs.

It has been my privilege to be the Editor of this Journal in its current format for the last ten years. Over this decade the quantity and the quality of submissions has increased significantly, a tribute to the dedication and interest of those members of the medical and scientific community who are committed to research. I am indebted to all reviewers who contributed their time to providing invaluable input and to providing the peer review process essential to maintaining standards. The MMJ benefitted from the support of a number of sponsors in the past who made it possible to provide each issue in hard copy and at no cost to the local medical and research community, whilst we also provided open access to the international community through the online version. Financial constraints have led to online publication of the Journal becoming the sole option. Limited human and financial resources have been an issue at different time points particularly over the last three years and I am grateful to the members of the Editorial Board who rose to the challenges encountered and helped ensure the continuing publication of the Malta Medical Journal.

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