

# “FOR YEARS MANY PHARMACISTS FELT THAT THEIR NEEDS WERE BEING IGNORED”



**ALFIE PALMIER IS THE PRESIDENT OF MOVIMENT VUČI GHALL-ISPIŻJARA. HE SPEAKS TO THE SYNAPSE ABOUT HIS VISION FOR THE MOVEMENT AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE PHARMACISTS' PROFESSION**

## **TS: Why did you choose pharmacy as profession?**

The obsession of mixing things together started in my parent's kitchen when I was a child and it has gone on ever since. My intrigue with science started upon my discovery of the chemistry set at the age of seven. I was so persistent on convincing my father to buy me one that I resolved to doing an impromptu dance performance on the kitchen table; surprisingly it worked! Throughout my schooling, sciences were an obvious choice, however, opting to read for a degree in pharmacy was not! Other courses seemed more appealing at the time, nevertheless, I ended up enrolling in pharmacy – with reservations. During the first semester I was still unsure of whether I made the right choice but by the end of the first year all doubts had faded away. I was part of a group of classmates who throughout the years became close friends and eventually respected colleagues.

## **TS: You are currently the president of the *Moviment Vuči għall-Ispiżjara*. When was this 'moviment' conceived? What are its aims and objectives?**

In my career as a pharmacist, I have so far touched upon three different sectors, namely community pharmacy, regulatory work and medical representation. All three sectors entail interaction with a variety of people from all walks of life, including other pharmacists; and this is what allowed me to excel on the job. In my opinion the deciding factor in securing my appointment as president of *Moviment Vuči għall-Ispiżjara* is my approachability. I have always been a sociable creature and I have been told that I am easy to talk to. I trust that my vision of unity is shared by many fellow pharmacists. For years many pharmacists felt that their needs were being ignored. Furthermore, many issues were being dealt with behind closed doors which, although done in good faith, limited room for dialogue.

The idea of *Moviment Vuçi għall-Ispizjara* was conceived at a wedding during a casual chat between pharmacists on issues affecting the pharmacy profession. The strongest sentiment shared was the need for a radical change! The talk didn't stop there, as we started discussing with other pharmacists on the matter and found a common element that resonated – the fear to take a stand single-handedly. The new-born movement, set up in 2014, seemed to be the ideal platform where people felt secure enough to speak their mind without fear of retribution.

**TS: The Chamber of Pharmacy has made contributions towards, example, the Medicines Act, the Healthcare Act, and most notably, the inception and running of the POYC. Nonetheless, last year, your association presented a petition signed by hundreds of pharmacists to call an election to elect new members of the Chamber board. Why did you feel that their board members had to change?**

For six years running, the Chamber had no annual general meeting with no change in Chair. I appreciate that the Chamber is made up of volunteers with busy schedules, howbeit, in a profession such as ours, which has far-reaching effects on the public in general, there are pressing issues that must be attended to promptly. The time for change had come! The baton had to be passed on to the younger generation of pharmacists experienced in different aspects of the profession to be part of the moulding process that would bring about effective and tangible change.

**TS: Following the election, on 19th December 2014, a new Executive Council was elected. Notwithstanding your shortcomings such as lack of funding, no website, etc, your association lobbied its ideas intensively through social media. Despite this, only one of your eight candidates was elected, i.e. Marisabelle Bonnici. Were you expecting such a result?**

I must stress the fact that this movement is not a union nor a legal entity. We garnered enough interest and trust to open a separate union but we believe that we stand stronger together. I got 123 votes of 278 which is a fair amount for a novice. People were fired up enough to contribute strongly to the Chamber



2009 - Awarded the Order of Merit by the Hospitaller Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem. In the photo he is appearing alongside his mother, Amanda



On the set of *13 Hours - The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi*. Actor with David Costabile

and although only one of our team was elected, I am pleased to see that the Chamber understands the need for inclusion. We were instrumental in increasing the number of new and young members on the Chamber by arousing interest in its activities. The Chamber is a legacy, it is our house and it has done a great deal of good. We simply wanted to re-ignite vocation towards the profession and through our manifesto (which is still on-line & which is based on people's feedback).

**TS: Has your association found support from other champions, worth mentioning, in the pharmacy field?**

It might be surprising to know that we funded ourselves from our own pockets. Our work is based on the support which we receive from the pharmacists who believe in having a voice without any bias.

**TS: How can one become a member of *Moviment Vuçi għall-Ispizjara*? Are there any membership fees?**

There is no membership fee and it is open to all pharmacists.

**TS: Returning to yourself, in the past, you had singing stings. Are you still active in this field or now, you have other hobbies**

My grandfather was a tenor in the UK who kicked off his career at the age of 10 on the BBC and performed alongside great British entertainers such as Shirley Bassey and Bernie Clifton. For many years I was merely a passionate shower singer but during my time at Junior College my chemistry teacher suggested that I should sing in public. I did eventually form part of the band *The Elements* and began singing at soirees. Music has always helped me cope with stress and my skills now include piano playing and strings. I also enjoy acting and was one of the Maltese actors in the film *13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi* directed by Michael Bay and due for release in January 2016.

**TS: Describe yourself in three adjectives.**

Hardworking, humble, and optimistic. ❄️

## I READ THE SYNAPSE BECAUSE...

I respect it as a professional journal written for all local practitioners which showcases the innovative work conducted by Maltese Healthcare professionals. The journal features interesting studies, however, I feel that it should include more contributions by local pharmacists.

