

Back with a Bang: Malta's Medical Community Reunites

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Malta's medical community gathered in force for the **11th Malta Medical School Conference**, returning after a COVID-19 hiatus. With over 800 participants, 558 research presentations, and a heartfelt tribute to **Prof. Alex Felice**, the event celebrated Maltese medical academia while fostering learning, networking, and innovation for the next generation of researchers. Beyond its formal sessions, the conference served as a living testament to the resilience, collaboration, and shared purpose that define Malta's medical community.



The 11th Malta Medical School Conference held at the end of 2025
Photo by Kristov Scicluna

The return of the Malta Medical School Conference at the end of 2025 was more than just a resumption of tradition.

It was a powerful reaffirmation of Malta's medical community. After a pause imposed by COVID-19, the 11th edition carried extra significance. With over 800 registrants and the highest number of invited speakers in the event's history, the conference underscored the vitality and ambition of Malta's research in medicine.

The conference was hosted at the Malta Mediterranean Conference Centre, a venue steeped in history. Once the **Sacra Infermeria** of the Knights of St John – the pinnacle of medieval medical practice and innovation – today its modern facilities provide a platform for cutting-edge learning and research. This subtle interplay of history and modernity reflects the essence of Maltese medical education – grounded in tradition yet always looking forward. The building itself set a tone of gravitas, quietly reminding attendees that they are part of a continuum of medical progress spanning generations.

Prof. Simon Attard Montalto captured the spirit of the event in his opening remarks, urging participants to 'look at it as a celebration of Maltese medical academia.' His words framed the conference not merely as a series of presentations, but as a celebration of community, curiosity, and shared purpose – a gathering that brings together generations of students, researchers, and educators.

Participants came from a range of specialties and professional stages, from medical students presenting their first research to seasoned clinicians sharing decades of experience. International speakers added global perspectives, highlighting Malta's role in wider medical discourse while reinforcing connections across borders.

The sheer breadth of expertise and enthusiasm brought a dynamic energy to the event, showcasing the Faculty's commitment to both excellence and inclusivity.

REMEMBERING A VISIONARY: THE LEGACY OF PROF. ALEX FELICE

A highlight of the conference was a special tribute to Prof. Alex Felice, a pioneer in Maltese medical research. From advancing thalassemia studies to championing rare diseases, Prof. Felice helped shape the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery's vision and inspired generations of students and researchers.

In recognition of his contributions, the rare diseases session was renamed 'The Prof. Alex Felice Memorial Symposium', ensuring that his legacy continues to resonate with new generations of researchers and clinicians. Beyond his scientific

achievements, Felice embodied the ethos of mentorship, enthusiasm, and dedication that the Faculty strives to cultivate in all students. His work in rare diseases demonstrated the importance of focusing on often-overlooked areas of medicine, showing how sustained research can have a global impact while remaining firmly rooted in a local context.

This acknowledgement was more than ceremonial. It reinforced a key principle of the Faculty's mission: that research and education must be interwoven with values of collaboration, curiosity, and social responsibility. By highlighting Felice's contributions, the conference sent a clear message to attendees: excellence in medicine requires not only technical skill but also vision, empathy, and leadership.

FIRST STEPS, BIG IMPACT: STUDENTS TAKE THE STAGE

For many participants, the conference offered a transformative experience. Students and early career practitioners

had the opportunity to present research for the first time, engage with peers and international experts, and explore learning beyond traditional lecture halls. These experiences fostered confidence, collaboration, and a deeper sense of belonging within Malta's medical community.

The conference demonstrated that its success was built on speakers' active contribution to a vibrant exchange of ideas and energy. Each presentation, discussion, and question added to a culture of intellectual curiosity, where learning is both interactive and communal. It highlighted the Faculty's commitment to nurturing students' holistic development.

Participation at this scale also underscored the Faculty's strategic vision. By providing students with opportunities to engage with global experts, the conference encourages the development of skills that extend beyond the classroom: critical thinking, research literacy, and the ability to communicate complex ideas ➤



A special tribute to Prof. Alex Felice
Photo by Kristov Scicluna



effectively. These competencies are essential in preparing Malta's next generation of medical leaders.

LEARNING BEYOND THE LECTURE HALL

The conference offered much more than a formal schedule of talks. For participants, it was an opportunity to engage in professional dialogue, where ideas can be tested and challenged. It also allowed students to see theoretical principles come to life through local findings and innovations, countering the perception that meaningful studies and research happen abroad. In turn, exposure to ongoing local research further reinforced the value of grounding global medical knowledge in the realities of one's own healthcare context.

The diversity of sessions allowed attendees to explore multiple facets of medicine. This breadth of content reflects the Faculty's vision of medicine as a multidisciplinary field – one in which research, education, and

patient care inform and strengthen one another. By encountering both international perspectives and locally generated evidence, the conference reinforced the importance of cultivating broad perspectives alongside deep expertise to navigate complex challenges in future careers.

BUILDING BRIDGES: PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND NETWORKING

Workshops, panel discussions, and interactive sessions created avenues for meaningful exchange. For the Faculty, these moments are more than logistical achievements. They reflect a commitment to enriching future leaders in medicine by encouraging students and early-career researchers to cultivate skills beyond research – communication, critical thinking, and professional networking.

By bringing together seasoned researchers and emerging professionals, the conference fostered intergenerational collaboration by strengthening connections that will

shape the future of Maltese medicine.

It demonstrates that academic growth is inherently communal, built on mentorship, dialogue, and shared expertise. The Faculty's active involvement ensures that these connections extend beyond a single event, embedding participants in networks that support career development and lifelong learning.

This networking also provides an invaluable opportunity to discuss local and regional challenges in healthcare. By connecting clinical experience with research innovation, the conference emphasises the Faculty's dual commitment to education and societal impact, reinforcing Malta's role as a hub for medical scholarship in the Mediterranean.

LOOKING FORWARD: CELEBRATING LEGACY AND PROGRESS

The 11th Malta Medical School Conference was a reminder of what can be achieved when vision, dedication, and collaboration



Left: Medical professionals and students gathered at the 11th Malta Medical School Conference, deeply engaged in the presentations and discussions

Right: Chair of the organising committee, Prof. Simon Attard Montalto

Photos by Kristov Scicluna

converge. It celebrated not only the legacy of pioneers like Prof. Alex Felice but also the enthusiasm and talent of the next generation of medical professionals.

For the Faculty, the event reinforces core values: a commitment to academic excellence, the cultivation of research and teaching, and the creation of opportunities for students to develop their potential. Beyond this, it represents a tangible manifestation of the Faculty's mission to foster a culture where mentorship and collaboration are central to medical education. It is a celebration of the present achievements of Maltese medical academia and an investment in its future.

The conference also reminds the community that Malta's medical identity is both local and global. By fostering connections with international speakers and encouraging research that addresses both local healthcare needs and broader scientific questions, the Faculty cultivates

a medical ecosystem that is forward-looking while grounded in its societal responsibility.

THE TEAM BEHIND THE SUCCESS

No conference of this scale is possible without careful coordination and the collective commitment of dedicated individuals working diligently behind the scenes. The administrative team, together with the volunteers from the Malta Medical Students Association, played a pivotal role in ensuring that every aspect of the event was executed seamlessly – from meticulous logistical planning to providing continuous support to delegates and speakers. Their professionalism, efficiency, and enthusiasm were further strengthened by the important contribution of the members of the Malta Medical School Conference Committee, whose guidance, experience, and oversight helped maintain the high academic and professional standards that defined the conference.

Special recognition is also due to the Dean of the Faculty, Prof. Godfrey LaFerla, whose leadership and steadfast commitment to academic excellence continue to foster an environment that encourages scholarly advancement and professional growth. The vision, dedication, and tireless efforts of the Chair of the Organising Committee, Prof. Simon Attard Montalto, together with the Chair of the Scientific Committee, Prof. Christian Scerri, were instrumental in shaping a scientific programme of high calibre, ensuring both its relevance and its lasting impact. Their expertise, strategic direction, and unwavering support were invaluable throughout the entire organisational process.

The combined efforts of all those involved ensured not only the smooth and efficient running of the conference but also its overall success. Their dedication serves as a powerful reminder that progress in medicine is a shared endeavour, built on collaboration, commitment, and a collective pursuit of excellence. **T**