

An Integrated Approach to the Management of Health Care in Malta

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A successful health care programme depends directly on the team work of a group of people who care about and who care for patients in the management of their sickness with the aim of allaying the symptoms in all cases and of a complete cure whenever possible. This team is made up of general practitioners, hospital medical officers, consultants, pharmacists, dentists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, nurses and social workers.

According to the front cover of the *Pharmaceutical Journal* of September 18th, 1982, in the 16th Century the physician and pharmacist worked closely together, but today we rarely see them depicted together. This might be so in other countries, but I am pleased to say, it is not the case in Malta. The pharmacist is an important member of the team looking after the sick. His place as a prominent member of this team has been enhanced by a working programme planned between the Department of Medicine and the Department of Pharmacy of our University under the auspices of the Ministry of Health. This working programme will be discussed later in this paper; at this stage I am going to dwell on the situation in Malta vis-a-vis the traditional relationship between the pharmacist and the physician.

Malta is a small country with a population of about one third of a million packed in about 100 square miles of land area. Everyone is known to and by everyone else especially so in the same sphere of work or in the same professional activity. There is only one University in Malta. The end result is that most pharmacists and doctors of the same age have rubbed shoulder to shoulder in their university years not only in the lecture rooms but also and even more so in the extracurricular activities such as sports. This bond of present and past friendships leads naturally to excellent team work spirit between most pharmacists and doctors; they treat each other as colleagues and discuss common health problems together.

It is interesting to point out that up to the late fifties, medical students were allowed to follow the Course of Pharmacy (leading to the B.Pharm.

Degree) concurrently with the M.D. course. As a result a large number of doctors in Malta (of average age forty-eight years) have qualified as pharmacists as well as doctors.

Another factor which strengthens the bond between pharmacists and physicians is the fact that in Malta it is common practice for community pharmacists to provide rooms for visiting general practitioners and consultants. The proximity between the two enables further direct and frequent contacts between pharmacist and physician.

In hospital work, keeping in mind that in Malta we have only one general hospital the relationship between doctor and pharmacist has traditionally been excellent, one helping the other. Frequent administrative meetings take place between the Chief Pharmacist and physicians regarding:

- a. The ready availability of most commonly used drugs;
- b. the date of expiry of stock medicines, e.g. antibiotics; (When expiry date is near, a circular is sent to all doctors to attract their attention and ask their cooperation about this fact.)
- c. the newest drugs as described in the world's leading journals of Medicine and Pharmacy are discerned and if applicable stocks are bought for the hospital;
- d. preparations of IV infusions; their problems are discerned e.g. 5% Dextrose, Normal Saline solutions.
- e. the Hospital Formulary is reviewed from time to time to
 - i. add new drugs
 - ii. remove from stock old fashioned drugs, no longer in use.

With the rising costs of medicine this job is not only beneficial to the patient's health but also to the country's economy.

For a great number of years this job was the responsibility of a sub-committee of the Hospital Management Committee, chaired by the Professor of Medicine.

