

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY... MORE THAN ANYTHING MEANS A GREAT EDUCATION ELEARNING VS TRADITIONAL FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION

In a 1980 interview, Steve Jobs (1955 – 2011), an American entrepreneur, businessman, inventor and industrial designer once stated that *'Equal opportunity to me more than anything means a great education.'* This proves to be a most convenient introduction to this editorial which will discuss the relevance of continuing medical education and eLearning for healthcare professionals.

Let's face it. Educators face a number of key challenges in the provision of continuing medical education programmes. To name a few, the World Federation of Medical Education [<http://wfme.org/>] mentions inadequate leadership, insufficient resources, lack of programme supervision and resistance to change. In essence, one might well say that the main challenge is the development of modules which are easily accessible [including cost], of good quality [including ease-of-use], and yet, flexible enough to fit in the lifestyle of prospective participants.

The World Organization of Family Doctors [www.globalfamilydoctor.com/] and the World Federation of Medical Education particularly recommend flexibility and adaptability in the provision of continuing medical education programmes. Indeed, a lack of flexible training opportunities have been signalled as reasons leading to medical brain drain. In keeping with this, self-directed learning is shaping itself as a robust pillar of lifelong learning, alongside traditional taught curricula.

It only makes sense that for continuing medical education programmes to succeed, these need to include eLearning modules. These eLearning modules need to be spearheaded by competent and experienced stakeholders who have access and are willing to manage the required [1] manpower (including content built-up) and [2] technological infrastructure (including the development of a stable and robust delivery platform) to be able to implement and disseminate such eLearning modules in an efficient and effective way. Quality assurance is the linchpin of the entire process, in view of the changing nature of healthcare provision and increasing expectations of participants and patients alike. Such total quality management should be monitored through continuous checks and

balances ingrained in the process, preferably by an independent body. This should obviously include periodic data mining exercises to perform feedback analysis.

The challenge relating to manpower should not be underestimated. It is true that candidates eligible for continuing medical education have increased over the years. This obviously entails a significant burden on the provision of education since more tutors are required to teach and supervise students. And the future of traditional taught curricula within the context of local continuing medical education does not look any rosier, since it would seem that manpower resources will be stretching even more in the immediate future. Let me elaborate this further. As discussed in the previous editorial, the recent agreement between the Maltese Ministry of Health and the Queen Mary University of London relating to the opening of a medical school in Gozo foresees the opening of a campus of the Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry. The Maltese government confirmed that the first students will be accepted in September 2017. This will stress the current manpower resources, specifically relating to the provision of continuing medical education, even more. In keeping with this, during the last months, medical students have consistently voiced their concern that the privatisation of medical education in Malta would dilute the medical school's education resources.

The development of accredited eLearning modules will, logically, offset any manpower shortages ...

In view of the above, all stakeholders need to roll up their sleeves, adapt [more] to the concept of eLearning and develop eLearning modules, similar to the ones currently hosted by the Malta Medical Foundation Programme [<http://fpmalta.com/foundation-programme/e-learning/>].

Ending with Steve Job's challenging remark, the provision of free-of-charge [or cheap] eLearning modules, accredited by professional bodies, will surely provide an equal opportunity to all concerned to access great education. 🇲🇹

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