



Addressing the positive plan to the Multitude

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Two members of the Executive of the Chamber of Pharmacists, Maryanne Ciappara, B.Pharm. and Maryann Felice Sant Fournier, B.Pharm., M.Phil., participated in the International Conference 'Together Against Drugs', held on the 5th and 6th April 1986, at the Hilton Hotel, Malta, organized by the Lions Club (Malta) and held under the auspices of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. The following is a review of the conference:

AWARENESS AND SELF HELP

This conference was organised to contribute to the increase in **awareness** in drug abuse and also help parents, social workers, youth leaders and young people themselves to understand the problem and have the courage to face it.

The conference was attended by over 200 persons including, those who are in daily contact with young people, some of whom are on drugs; those who can contribute interesting views on the problems of young people even though they have not been in contact with drug users, and, those who attended to learn about the problem and hopefully be better prepared to face it in the future.

The panel of experts who spoke during the conference included foreign and Maltese speakers. After an opening speech by conference chairman, Mr. A.J. Tabone and an address by Lions Club (Malta), Mr. Jos. F. De-panes, messages of congratulations and support were read out from various world personalities, including His Holiness the Pope and Mrs. Nancy Reagan. The assembly was then addressed by His Grace the Archbishop of Malta, Mgr. Joseph Mercieca, B.A., Ph.B., S.Th.D., J.U.D., who expressed the Church's view on the problem of drug abuse, this being not only a social one but also one of moral implications.

GOVERNMENT'S MULTISECTIONAL APPROACH

At the start of his speech the Hon. Minister of Health, Dr. Vincent Moran, M.D., M.P., remarked that unfortunately, today's populations are drug-consuming, alcohol and tobacco having become socially acceptable. The abuse of legal drugs such as sedatives require care in prescribing and the enactment of laws has been deemed necessary to curtail such abuses. The speaker then proceeded to give an historic resumé of salient points in the modernisation of the legislation affecting psychotropic drugs culminating in the Drugs Control Regulations 1985. The role of the pharmacist in the control of the so-called 'soft drugs', i.e., psychotropic drugs and drugs of dependence, was here referred to.

There is also a pressing need to coordinate and promote rehabilitation facilities for alcoholics and illegal drug users. The importance of information and education was also emphasised, in line with the strategies and targets developed by WHO Regional Office for Europe and Programme of Health for ALL by the Year 2000.

An integrated system such as one involving the Department of Social Services, Caritas and Alcoholics Anonymous is deemed to be most effective. Indeed, the setting up of various therapeutic centres run by both

the State and Church was considered to be most beneficial in the fight against drug abuse. The Caritas Induction Centre screens drug abusers for potential detoxification and the Methadone Clinic at the hospital where a recent innovation is the administration of a **single** daily dose of methadone **under supervision** certifies the patients as drug-free and ready to proceed to undergo group therapy such as at drug-free residential rehabilitation facilities. Another recent innovation is the separation of Hospital Psychiatric clinic from that for Drug Abusers.

It is also important to update information and set up an information centre which will be a Health Education Resource and monitor on a continual basis the drug problem. Computerisation is envisaged in the near future and this will be a great asset in the identification of problem areas.

DRUGS IN OUR SOCIETY

Mr. Jim Cumberton, President of the European Federation of Therapeutic Communities, laid the emphasis on Prevention and parents. He said that Europe awaits the 'cocaine explosion'; already nearby as has been in the U.S. The pattern of drug abuse is continuously changing; the cost is tremendous in terms of law enforcement, personal and familiar misery, the family being totally unprepared to handle the 'drug epidemic'. Society is passive, accepting illicit drug abuse to some degree due to uncertainty of values and ambiguity of parental roles. But, 'drugs are everyone's business' and it is useless to put the blame on our police corps, schools, etc. In this way one only avoids direct involvement. The old adage 'Prevention is better than cure' is most indicative in this context, for, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "You cannot cure drug addiction by means of drugs". The democratic way is through **Education**, an area of greatest need; equipped with **correct** information imparted to them by concerned individuals, professionals themselves suitably educated in the matter, parents can (and must) take action and be instrumental in bringing about positive results at neighbourhood level, becoming ultimately a 'world-wide power'! Indeed, in education programmes it would be 'Fatal' to ignore parents... therapeutic activities by professionals alone will fail — parents must be involved or drugs will not be beaten. "...in this way one avoids direct involvement".

REHABILITATION — LOGOTHERAPEUTICS AND SELF-HELP PROGRAMMES

The logotherapeutic treatment was discussed, albeit superficially by Dott. Giacinto Froggio (Italy).

Logotherapy relies on the drug abuser coming back to understand the real values of life. It is based on the 'psychological dimension' in that man being free has also a will of his own with all the risks that are involved. The addict has an existential frustration due to a lack of meaning in life, he is apathetic, has no sense of values, of creativity... logotherapeutics is exactly the opposite, it tries to instil positivity, creative values, satisfaction derived from time well spent — in productive work. It helps the individual to take a stand in certain life-situations, such as saying "NO" to drugs and becoming 'unself-centred'. These can help to leave the drug situation and change the whole attitude towards life.

THE WORK OF CARITAS IN MALTA — THE INDUCTION CENTRE

Mgr. Victor Grech spoke about Caritas and its rehabilitation centre for drug abusers, known as the Induction Centre which is run on a self-help programme. Treatment is given free of charge by trained staff of 5 full timers and 3 ex-drug addicts who were treated abroad. The programme is divided into 2 parts. Induction involves primarily, motivation to change the lifestyle; this is achieved especially through involvements of the addicts' family nucleus. No fixed methods are used, but care, confidence and trust are the 'magic words'. The addict must also undergo a detoxification programme at the hospital. Once certified drug-free, the person is ready to move to the second phase: the Day Programme. This is based mainly on Static or open sessions, Data and confrontation groups. Other activities include Occupational Therapy and family meetings where parents and relatives support each other and are made aware of the 'Tough Love Concept'.

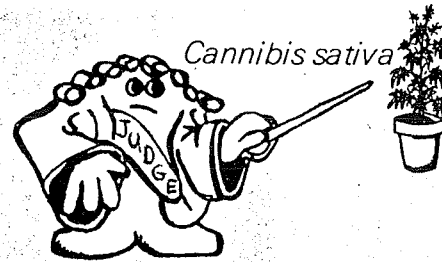
The centre was opened in March 1985 and since then more than 75 young people have been treated. The severity of abuse is evidenced by the result of an opinion poll held in March 1986 which shows that 30 per cent of respondents, mostly youths between 17-25 years of age, admitted that they were offered illicit drugs on more than one occasion in discos, schools and on the streets. Caritas has also formulated a Programme of Prevention, to show the horrible effects on mental and physical health which drug abuse causes and that drug abuse can and should be avoided through better preparation for life given to youths and through the encouragement of activities which provide an alternative to drugs. This has culminated in the planning of a "Social and Life Skills Programme" which at the moment is being run in a number of Church Secondary Schools. Teachers will also be able to attend a course to be trained in the running of such a programme. In the schools and in the community, Action Groups are being formed to work in surroundings which are familiar; a number of courses run by specially-trained Maltese persons and foreign experts have been held for these groups.

It is planned that in the near future youths will organise themselves against drug-trafficking through activities known as 'Youth To Youth'.

THE LEGAL ASPECT OF DRUG ABUSE

The Hon. Dr. Guido Demarco, B.A., LL.D., M.P., stressed the need for the right infrastructure in our society

whereby drug abusers are made to realise that they are offending not only society but even themselves. This could be achieved through the identification of an institution designated by the Minister of Health whereby, instead of applying punishment, the abuser is remitted to a Centre for Rehabilitation. He emphasized that the shortcoming in the judicial system existing presently, in that the accused addict may be brought to face the Magistrate's court or trial by jury must be rectified, as this has a grave bearing on the sentence imposed.



DRUGS AND YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY — GIVING OUR YOUTH A BETTER CHANCE

Particular stress was made during the conference on the effect of drugs on young people. Fr. Charles Cini S.D.B., S.Th.L., World Delegate for Salesian Past Pupils, emphasised the necessity of timely intervention by parents because of his very nature the drug addict would take a long time to seek help and it is therefore important to "go out and look for him". Hence the operative plan must be addressed to the multitude and not to a selected number of addicts. He also dealt on the effectiveness of the 'Youth to Youth' programme.

Mr. Bill Rice, Executive Director, Tacade, then dealt on what alternative choices can be offered to our young people. The tripartite model of drug addiction was looked into in detail. This may be summarized as follows: 1. Core of information — selective, concise; 2. 'Feeling' — ability and skills to look into oneself and see how one is; 3. 'Doing' — e.g., resisting peer pressure and skills. The role of parents was highlighted throughout the exercise.

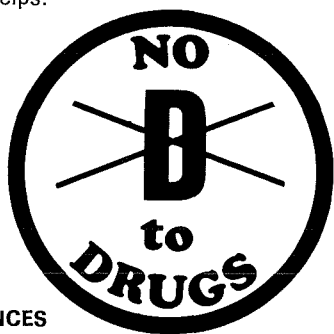
THE LAW ENFORCER'S POINT OF VIEW

Supt. Joseph Psaila said that the Police Corps in Malta are constantly waging war against drugs, although, in dealing with drug trafficking, difficulty is encountered as a result of the lack of cooperation from the general public. The local police force has gradually been provided with the necessary equipment and also with a nucleus of staff trained overseas with other police forces and drug enforcement agencies to aid their fight against drug growers, smugglers, dealers, users. He said that cannabis (marijuana, grass) is the most popular illicit drug on the island due mainly to its relatively cheap price and widespread availability, probably as a result of Malta's climate; we now have cannabis plantations with a harvest for the local market. Cocaine and Heroin are however on the increase but of course these are more expensive. Psychotropic drug abuse is also on the increase. Police activities range from strict control of the maritime traffic to entertainment spots; the vice squad has studied the local drug situation in 1985 and presented its recommendations to government

resulting in the recent amendments in legislation for traffickers, who are not drug users, but deadly merchants. Malta also cooperates with Interpol in the fight against drugs on an international scale.

A MEDICAL VIEWPOINT

Dr. George Debono, M.D., K.R.C. Psych., consultant psychiatrist with experience in the treatment of drug abusers in Malta and abroad, considered the problem from the medical aspect. He said that drug addiction is a psychic-physical state, resulting from taking a drug and only exists if there is **compulsion**. Both the patient receiving medication for a mental illness and the young person obtaining such a medication clandestinely can become addicts, depending on the pharmacological properties of the drug in question, the personality of the user and the environment. Referring to basic principles of psychocity, learning can be by the help of the senses or by conditioned reflexes e.g., response to pain; but drugs initially give a response which is pleasant and immediate and thus warrants repetition leading to abuse. The adolescent (14-17 yrs.) is becoming an adult and undergoes a mood swing with transient depression. He needs guidance which he usually gets if family relations are good; if not, he will resort to his peers who may lead him to drugs. These bring about a pleasant, altered state of consciousness which temporarily solves his problems, but it also leads to repetitive drug taking and addiction. It can happen in any family type, depending on the person's personality. Medical treatment, as said elsewhere, gives poor results but **drug-related** disorders can be treated. Occasional users ('transient flirtation') with no psychiatric complications usually only need guidance; but, addicts with infections due to lowered body resistance and depression need to undergo detoxification (1-7 weeks depending on the type of drugs they are addicted to and other factors). This is followed by an assessment of any underlying psychiatric condition or whether the drug has caused any mental disorder, e.g., cannabis addiction leads to severe psychotic illnesses including depression. Other parts of the treatment include insertion in a therapeutic community and meeting ex-addicts; changing friends and locality also helps.



LIVE EXPERIENCES

A mother of an ex-addict and two ex-addicts faced the assembly and related their live experiences. This session perhaps was the most effective in creating that degree of awareness and commitment so necessary to the fight against drug abuse.

It may come as a shock to learn that the mother was a typically 'nice' Maltese lady, who had said like so many others, 'Drugs will not come into my family!' She related her heartbreak at finding out that her son

was on heroin and the sacrifices the family went through to rally behind their child, not the least the self-righteous accusations of society.

But her question 'how do drugs reach our children at school?' must have set the educators in the audience thinking. A standing ovation was the least tribute she deserved and rightly obtained.

"THE ONLY WAY OUT OF HEROIN IS DEATH"

The first shy young man, ex-heroin addict told us this. He was only 15 years old when he started. "... not living on this earth..." on alcohol to feel more at ease with his peers, with girls. He then moved to smoking 'grass'. This was his first real decision and an instinctive 'about turn' to prove himself against his 'typically, over-protective Maltese parents'. He was aware of the dangers of heroin, worried about his close friend who had fallen prey to IT whilst away from the island. But, he was also **seduced** by the thought of IT and through curiosity, he tried heroin. He felt a different person, problems brushed aside. He had to build himself a new image, a lie; he committed petty thefts and even peddled the drug (a junkie). But, "I really wanted out!..." and he underwent detoxification. Today he says, "It would be hard to repeat on a second occasion!" Another standing ovation.

"FOR THE FIRST TIME I FOUND PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTOOD ME (AT DON MARIO PICCHI CLINIC, ITALY)"

Thus said the second ex-addict, another shy young man who based his talk on the three main factors which affect youth favourably or not, namely, society, family and school. It is important to "get away and escape from drugs" because when one is addicted, one is "not living on this earth".

THE WORKSHOPS-DISCUSSION GROUPS

On Saturday afternoon, the assembly resolved itself into discussion groups with recommendations made by the various participants being adopted by the conference. There were six workshops all dealing with various aspects of the acute problem of drug abuse. The following are the workshop titles:

1. The Role of Educators and Parents in the Fight Against Drug Abuse.
2. The Attitude of Society to Drug Abuse.
3. The Effectiveness of Legislative Measures in the Fight Against Drug Abuse.
4. Primary Prevention of Drug Abuse — Information, Awareness and Education.
5. Rehabilitation, After-care and Social Reintegration of the Drug Abuser.
6. Peer Pressure and Drug Abuse.

It was a great disappointment to the would-be participants of workshop no. 3 that this was not held on the grounds that there were too few applicants. It was generally felt that even five persons would have given a valid contribution to a discussion on such an important subject as the effectiveness of legislative measures in drug abuse.

The discussion group in which we participated was workshop no. 4, indeed 'drug awareness and prevention proved to be of marked interest so much so that the

participants were divided into two separate groups. Our group was chaired by Mr. J. Sammut of Caritas and the secretary was Mr. Cusens, a parent and a member of the Chamber of Engineers. The members included Mgr. Victor Grech, headteachers, teachers, nuns, parents, social workers, Supt. Joseph Psaila and a policewoman with experience in drug abuse education, friends of addicts and other interested persons.

We realised that there is a general lack of information on illicit drugs and their abuse especially expressed by mothers of teenagers and younger school children who seem to be easily approachable even at school.

Such themes as, whether more information on drugs and their abuse is necessary; whether we feel that there is a real drug problem in Malta; whether we should keep a low profile on this problem or if on the other hand a full blown national campaign against drug abuse is in order were discussed and more than one participant took the floor on these issues. How can I tell that my child (or pupil or friend) is on drugs? What can we do to keep our children off the streets? These were typical questions asked.

There was a general consensus on the need of educating parents and that educators must first receive correct information and training.

THE PHARMACISTS' ROLE

It may be interesting to note at this point that there is a particular ignorance on the importance of the role of the pharmacist in the context of drug abuse prevention and education; but more so, and perhaps more seriously, of his role, in general, as a health professional. Our mere identification with the profession immediately brought about a near accusation of indiscriminate dispensing over the counter of 'drogi' and the volunteering of gratuitous advice, thus, indirectly or directly, contributing to aggravating drug abuse.

Our participation was on the lines of presenting the community pharmacists as health educators, imparting correct information and advice on illicit drugs to parents and interested persons within the community; distributing printed information from pharmacies and displaying suitable visuals, all according to a carefully planned campaign for drug abuse prevention through education; subsequently, reaching schoolchildren and other groups through talks and suitable audiovisuals aids. All of this is in line with the work being carried out by PADA — Pharmacists Against Drug Abuse Foundation of the USA — with which the Chamber of Pharmacists has been collaborating for some time.

Our commitment was however finally comprehended and pharmacists were included in the list which made out the team which is to tackle the drug epidemic, including medical practitioners, social workers, the welfare service, the family, the judiciary, the Church, the government and voluntary organizations, but again unfortunately, when this recommendation was read out to the general assembly on Sunday morning, pharmacists were not included nor were they mentioned in the final report of the conference which was circulated to the participants and sent to the Government, Church Authorities, to all Members of Parliament, to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, to the Maltese and Overseas Press and to all those who work in the field of drug abuse

A letter of protest has been sent to the Chairman of the conference.

OUR COMMITMENT

This does not however deter us from taking steps to implement the Chamber's plans on drug abuse prevention through education. A course on drug abuse for pharmacists is presently underway at the Federation of Professional Bodies, in collaborating with Caritas and sponsored by Associated Drug Co. of Valletta. This is only the beginning.

In conclusion, we congratulate the Lions Club (Malta) for taking the initiative to organise such a conference. It was indeed very fortunate to have such a panel of experts who shared their wealth of experiences in this field with the participants at this international conference.

(continued from page 13)

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