

# Problems and Prospects of Pharmacy Practice in Malta

34 YEARS AGO

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This article describes the work of the Chamber of Pharmacists under its President Mr. Anthony Darmania<sup>(1) (2)</sup>. At this time there were two qualified pharmaceutical chemists on the Malta Legislative Assembly (M.L.A.), Mr. Emmanuel Attard Bezzina, Ph.C., and Dr. George Borg, Ph.C., M.D. In 1950 Mr. Darmania became Chief Pharmacist and years later he became Medical storekeeper in charge of the Medical stores. Three years later he was elected secretary of the Malta Government Professional Officers Association<sup>(3)</sup>.

## General Problems

1954 was Mr. Darmania's first year as President of the Chamber of Pharmacists and at the start of the work he set out the objectives before the committee and the profession in general. He was very well aware even from better personal experience, as was the editor of 'The Pharmacist', Mr. G. Saliba, Ph.C. that there was a general lack of appreciation and recognition of the work of the pharmacist stemming from the absence of appropriate regulations governing the exercise of the profession.

Under the direction of Mr. Darmania a new drive was launched to raise pharmacists out of their apathy and to make them conscious of their rights and obligations. Mr. Darmania had high hopes and a determination to struggle and not give up.

## 'The Pharmacist'

The first decision of the newly elected committee which had Mr. A. Darmania as President, Mr. R.A. Tua, Ph.C., B. Pharm., as Secretary, Mr. F. Felice, B.Sc., Ph.C. as Treasurer and Messrs. E. Attard Bezzina, Ph.C., M.L.A.; O.F. Alessandro, Ph.C., Miss M. Caruana, B.Sc., Ph.C., G. Manche, B.Pharm., G. Saliba, Ph.C. and T. Vella, B.Sc., Ph.C. as Members was to issue a modest printed periodical 'The Pharmacist'. The first issue was that of January-March 1954, Vol. 1 No. 1, and the stated aims as the editor Mr. G. Saliba explained were threefold: to give articles would would enable the pharmacist to keep abreast with new developments in the pharmaceutical field, to keep the members of the Chamber in touch with the activities of the committee and lastly to provide a means where-

by the Maltese pharmacist could air his aspirations, grievances and claims. There were four issues of this periodical till September 1955 and in all ways it reached the stated aims except for the last one. The response by the members of the profession as regards letters to the editor was poor.

## Contacts with the Medical and Health Department

These contacts were established to discuss several grievances amongst which were the tariff of professional fees, the retailing of medicinal products by unauthorised dealers, the lack of adequate legislation and the absence of a pharmacy board. Regarding discussions about the tariff of professional fees, contacts by the committee with the Medical and Health Department authorities were established in August 1953. A subcommittee by the Medical and Health Department was appointed to study this issue but the Chamber of Pharmacists refused to participate in this subcommittee's work until its request for a representation of three members on this subcommittee were met with. This request was acceded to in November 1954 and discussions started. After several meetings the Tariff of Professional Fees as proposed by the Chamber of Pharmacists (Table 1) was approved by the Medical Board with some minor modifications. One can note that in this agreement the Chamber decided to waive aside the right for a dispensing fee on insulin injections, whereas for other injections the tariff was threepence on the first phial and one penny for each additional phial. Another letter was sent to the Medical and Health Department pointing out several grievances, e.g. the retailing by unauthorised dealers

of such medicinal products as 'Aspro' and 'Detol'. Following this letter, instructions were issued to the sanitary inspectors to see that no medicinal products were being stocked by unauthorised dealers.

Another problem taken up was the lack of adequate legislation concerning medicines to be kept in dispensaries and medicines that could be sold without prescription. The relevant legislation to cover these grievances was enacted in October 1955 and published in the Malta Government Gazette of the 12th October 1955 as follows:

Notice 563: List of Medicinal substances which apothecaries may sell without prescription.

This replaced that of 9th August 1940.

Notice 564: Schedule of Poisonous substances.

Notice 565: List of Medicinal substances with which dispensaries are to be kept supplied.

This replaced that of 9th August 1940.

All these notices and corrections (Notices 648 of 25th November 1955) were all approved and signed for by Dr. A.V. Hyzler, M.D., M.L.A., then Minister of Health and Social Services under Prime Minister Dom Mintoff, B.Sc., B.E.&A., M.L.A.

### Call for Pharmacy Board

The Chamber felt that it was inadequately represented on the Medical Board; there were only two pharmacists, Mr. G.A. Agius, Ph.C., and Mr. A. Felice, M.P.S. with Mr. J. Darmanin, Ph.C., replacing any of them if they were unable to attend, from 16 additional members and 10 members on the committee. A formal request was made to the Medical and Health authorities for the foundation of a Pharmacy Board. The Chamber also insisted and obtained from the Medical Board a compilation of all pharmacies in Malta and their respective managing pharmacists.

### Salaries of Pharmacists employed in Government Service

The budget for 1954-55 was presented by the Finance Minister the Hon. Dr. J. Frendo Azzopardi, LL.D. on the 18th May 1954. When presenting the financial statement for 1954-55 Dr. Frendo stated that 'Government considers that it should acknowledge the fact that professional officers in possession of a university degree are not attracted by the commencing rate which government employment offers.' Government proposed to "allow increments for professionals

who are required to hold a degree of doctor of medicine, doctor of law or architect and civil engineer". The Chamber immediately showed its concern that such professional people as Notaries Public, Dentists, Legal Procurators and of course Pharmacists had been completely ignored, through an editorial in 'The Pharmacist', Vol. 1 no. , April-June 1954. In all these cases females would receive three quarters of these rates and would be required to resign on marriage. Is it any wonder pharmacists were not attracted to government service in view of this obvious discrimination between professionals? This distinction remains even today where pharmacists are not even considered as professional officers in the government salary scales.

### External Recognition of Pharmaceutical Chemist Ph.C. diploma and Bachelor's degree in Pharmacy B.Pharm. degree

In his talk to pharmacy undergraduates during the students congress of 1953, Mr. Darmania addressed the issue of the limited prospects open to Malta pharmacy graduates compared to those in the rest of the world. Abroad opportunities existed for jobs in hospitals, in retail, in industry, in research, in administration and also teaching opportunities in Universities. However local opportunities in 1954 were limited to retail pharmacy and to the few posts in the government hospital, between 5 and 8 for all three grades.

At that time, 1954, the number of pharmacists graduating from the Royal University of Malta had risen out of proportion to local requirements. The total graduates of 1952, 1953 and 1955 who were not also M.D.s was 71<sup>(4)</sup> and it was feared that saturation point would soon be reached and the dignity of the pharmaceutical profession would suffer as a result of this. A solution to this problem was the provision of fresh openings in the Government service and private hospitals, government dispensaries and with wholesalers. This Mr. Darmania felt would be the short term policy.

On a long term basis, the solution would have to be the recognition of the status of the local pharmacist by the authorities abroad. With this objective in mind, the Chamber took the initiative to negotiate for the recognition of the B.Pharm. degree and Ph.C. diploma of the Royal University of Malta with several people and institutions including the Vice-Chancellor and Rector Magnificus Royal University of Malta (letter of 5th December 1953), The Pharmacy Board

TABLE 1

## Pharmacists Professional Tariffs

*As proposed by the Chamber of Pharmacists and approved by the Medical Board in 1954.*

### 1. EXTEMPORANEOUS PREPARATIONS

Cachets for the first 12 or part thereof .....	2/6
Each additional 12 or part thereof ...	1/6
Capsules for the first 12 or part thereof .....	2/6
Each additional 12 or part thereof ...	1/6
Suppositories, pessaries, bougies per 12 or part .....	3/-
Each additional 12 or part thereof ...	2/-
Effervescent Granules first 4 ozs. or part .....	2/6
Each additional 4 ozs. or part .....	1/6
Ointments, creams etc. up to 1 oz. ...	1/6
Each additional 7 oz. or part .....	1/-
Ointments, creams etc. sterilized, up to 1 oz. ....	3/0
Each additional 1 oz. or part .....	1/6
Eye Drops, Oye Ointments, Aqueous preparations of penicillin .....	3/-
Ear drops, Nose drops .....	2/6
Individually wrapped powders for the first 12 or part .....	1/6
Powders in bulk or mixed, not less than 1 oz. ....	1/6
Emulsions, suspensions over and about 6 ozs. or part thereof .....	1/-
Lotions, Liniments up to 10 fluid oz. or part thereof .....	1. 6
Over 10 fl. ozs. or part thereof .....	2/-

Mixtures, Cargles, Mouth washes, paints and other fluid preparations not included in the above list up to 4 ozs. ....	1/6
Up to 8 ozs. ....	2/-

### 2. PREPARATIONS FROM STOCK

Pills, tablets, lozenges, pastilles, from stock:	
Up to 12 .....	1/-
12 to 36 .....	1/6
36 to 60 .....	2/6
Ointments, creams, pastes from stock:	
Up to 1 oz. ....	1/-
1 oz. to 2 ozs. ....	1/6
Over 2 ozs. ....	2/-
Kaolin poultice .....	1/-
Proprietary preparations dispensed unadmixed:	
For every 10/- or part thereof of Selling Price .....	
D.D.A. Prescriptions	
Preparations falling under Dangerous Drugs Regulations:	
An additional .....	1/-

### 3. URGENT PRESCRIPTIONS

For prescriptions between 8 p.m. and 8 a.m. or after eventually agreed closing hours, an overcharge of ... 5/-

of Australia (letter of 11th December 1953), The Dean of the Faculty of Science Royal University of Malta (letter of 16th November 1954), and the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain.

What was asked from the local university authorities was an immediate modification of the syllabus to achieve similarity and parity with that of London University especially to increase the number of hours of practical work and thus make it impossible to attend other courses concurrently. Besides the B.Pharm. graduates who went on to finish their medical studies and get their M.D. there were also several others who concurrently obtained a B.Sc. as a second or even as a third degree. The figures are as follows: 1952, 6 B.Sc. graduates, 1953, 1 B.Sc. graduate, 1955, 14 B.Sc. graduates. It was also asked that the lecturers in purely pharmaceutical subjects should be replaced by practising pharmacists.

Until June 1955 the Chamber felt that the University authorities had not yet taken a single practical step in ameliorating this situation. However on the 4th of May 1955, Act no. VII of 1955 was enacted. It amended the Medical and

Kindred Ordinance whereby to Sec 16 of Chapter 51 of the Ordinance was inserted the word "degree on". Thus the pharmacy course attained a degree status. The act was assented to by Governor R.E. Laycock on the 9th May 1955.

#### Conclusion

Much has been written about Mr. Darmania, and still more needs to be written to study the practice of pharmacy in Malta in the period 1954-1955, and the Chamber's contribution during these years under the presidency of Mr. Darmania. But one thing seems to be clear, Mr. Darmania was a man with a clear vision of what pharmacy practice should be like in Malta and in spite of the prevailing difficulties he worked hard to improve the situation for future generations of pharmacists.

- (1), (2) The Pharmacist Vol. 1 No. 1 January-March 1954 and Vol. 1 No. 2 April-June 1954, see Editorials, Open Letter by the President, Secretarial report, Prospects of the Maltese Pharmacist and Around and About.
- (3) Pronostku Malti 1955, Giov. Muscat, Valletta.
- (4) Register of Graduates 1916-1971. The Royal University of Malta 1972.