

# TWENTY YEARS OF ADVOCACY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

KENNETH GRECH & KATHLEEN ENGLAND

Just over twenty years ago, a small group of public health doctors met with a common vision to come together to be the voice for public health in Malta. Malta's application for EU membership had just been reactivated and in anticipation of the changes that were envisaged for specialisation and specialist training, we foresaw the need to form an association to represent the profession and also advocate for public health in Malta (and eventually in Europe).

A statute was drawn up based on these principles and we called the first general meeting with potential members on the 17th June 1999 to elect MAPHM's first Executive Committee. The Malta Association for Public Health Medicine was one of the first specialist associations to be formed and we anticipated the development of specialist training and registration by several years.

Since its inception in 1999 there have been 11 Executive Committees with 7 Presidents, who have all worked hard and striven to improve the quality of the public health specialty in Malta as well as provide a platform to discuss public health issues, both locally and in Europe.

Our membership grew to 48 full members, 7 specialist trainee members and 24 associate members, accounting for the large majority of public health doctors in Malta and of distinguished public health professionals working both within and outside of government and spanning a wide range of areas in public health. This gives MAPHM the opportunity to be at the heart of current public health issues and be the voice for public health in Malta. As a professional public health body MAPHM's role in society has always been to advocate for public health and empower the population on public health issues.

The future role of advocacy remains fundamental and MAPHM needs to continue to speak out in favour of the wider determinants of health, including: health equity and sustainability, the physical environment, health behaviour and the social determinants of health amongst other issues.

Given its nature as a voluntary organisation, its member's commitment depends on the motivation and determination of members who truly believe that MAPHM can make a difference in the health of the local population.

For MAPHM to continue to make headway into the future the increased involvement of all of its members is of utmost importance. The strength and cohesion of the specialty has allowed us to speak as one voice. This has placed MAPHM on the local and international map, gaining respect from our clinical colleagues and other public health experts abroad.

Indeed, we have been very active within European fora, sitting on the boards of the European Public Health Association, European Health Management Association, EU bodies, experts groups and agencies and for many years.

Our European credentials can be attested by the fact that Malta was selected and hosted the 5th European Public Health Conference in November 2012. Furthermore, Dr Natasha Azzopardi-Muscat a founding member and former President of MAPHM was elected to serve as President of the European Public Health Association for the period 2016-2020.

Specialist training remains a key deliverable for MAPHM. We were amongst the first to constitute a specialist training committee and indeed the first to adopt a tripartite model, with the inclusion of government and university representatives, besides those of MAPHM.

This innovative approach proved very successful in ensuring ownership and commitment from all stakeholders. We also invested in training our trainers and in developing and maintaining our training portfolio and programme. We also maintained consistent contact with foreign examiners and assessors in order to ensure objectivity in the training and assessment process. Between 2004 and 2007 15 completed their catch up training and after 2007, 21 trainees have entered our training programme.

Providing a source of independent public health local research is the next avenue which MAPHM intends to develop in the coming years. A number of entities offer funding opportunities and greater participation of MAPHM members is needed to exploit these opportunities. Further evolution of Continuous Professional Development programme and the setting up of a scientific research committee within MAPHM are more recent developments which attest to the importance MAPHM gives to this area.

This publication celebrates twenty years of advocating for public health, whilst documenting the changes that have occurred in public health in Malta over the past two decades. It also sets out the current and future challenges facing our speciality and the health of our population more broadly. We augur that MAPHM will continue to grow and develop for the benefit of its membership and public health in general.

## MAPHM IN NUMBERS



**48 Full**   **24 Associate**  
**7 Specialist Trainee**