

Medical education: a process in evolution

The count down to the eventual migration to Mater Dei is well under way at the University of Malta Medical School. Against this backdrop, exam fever is evident amongst our undergraduate students and those postgraduate students who are in their final year are concentrating on finalising their research and writing up their theses. It is heartening to see the work of years coming to fruition for our students who year after year do their alma mater proud.

The Medical School has the remit of awarding professional degrees to safe, competent future physicians. However, it also has the mandate to support and expand continuing professional development to meet the challenges of health service provision, as well as research and development for the service of the country and the community. There has therefore, been a move to diversify postgraduate training through the introduction of a number of Masters and Doctoral degrees ever year in a variety of fields and areas of interest.

Postgraduate students now can undertake studies and research leading to the degree of MSc in Pathology, Haematology, Molecular Genetics, Public Health, Clinical Pharmacology to mention a few and now our most recent addition, Family Medicine. Both local and international students register for these courses and successful completion of both taught and research courses is the norm. It is indeed gratifying to see students and faculty achieve excellence, publishing in both local and international peer reviewed journals as well as presenting their work in international fora.

Equally encouraging is the number of MPhil and PhD candidates registering annually with external examiners

repeatedly commenting on the high quality of work and publications. Over the years there have also been a number of degrees where the work has been carried out jointly between the University of Malta Medical School and in collaboration with institutions abroad. This aspect is particularly important in areas where access to cutting edge technology is essential to enable the development of new techniques in medicine – diagnostic or therapeutic – as well as new drugs to combat disease. As a result, local researchers are now in a better position to apply for research funding from European pharmaceutical and research funding agencies.

The surge in interest locally amongst faculty members to participate in multicentre trials predominantly in the areas of genetic basis of disease, epidemiology and drug trials is also a positive indication of a faculty committed to education and to optimising patient- centred healthcare.

As the undergraduate and postgraduate remit of the Medical School continues to increase, the proposed introduction of a Medical Education Unit is welcomed. It would help optimise and co-ordinate the administrative, academic and financial aspects of medical education in its broadest sense.

The future appears challenging and exciting for the Medical School which I am sure will rise to the occasion as it has done so often in the past. It should not be forgotten that the achievements of the Medical School have only been made possible by the dedication of its faculty to medical education and research, even in the face of awesome obstacles and at times, against all odds. It is this same commitment to excellence that will undoubtedly see the School through this century.

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