

# A Message from the Dean

Godfrey LaFerla

It is perhaps with a certain degree of pride that I am writing this letter in what can be considered as the first 100 days in my position as Dean. I say this because a number of important changes are about to take place in the light of recent events. We may now be in a position to redraw our medical education starting from the undergraduate education right through to postgraduate studies.

The *raison d'être* of any Medical School is to foster medical education. However on many occasions we seem to lose focus on what the 'end-product' should be. The Medical School is not there to produce young highly qualified specialists but newly qualified housemen. Therefore the whole training programme should be geared along those lines. In my opinion, an MD graduate at the end of five years of medical training should be

1. a mature individual,
2. a doctor with a basic knowledge of medicine able to make sound, safe and effective decisions at primary level;
3. an individual capable of assimilating further knowledge that can transform him/her to a specialist level capable of functioning at that high grade.

Our Medical School has always enjoyed high standards but at this crucial moment in history, with the European question fully and finally settled, we should derive maximum benefit from co-operation with our European partners.

In order to improve on our present achievements and allow our young students participate in the mobility programmes and our future doctors to be fully adaptable to the future working conditions, it should be our prime objective to radically look at the present curriculum structure with two aims in mind. We need to continue with the invaluable work of the Curriculum committee to devise a more practical curriculum with less emphasis on minutiae and more emphasis on practical skills. The second important aim would be to convert, with the help of the heads and members of each department, our conventional teaching to the European credit system. I am fully aware that much progress has been done along these lines and I look forward to having the full credit system published in book form in the near future. These adaptations will then allow freedom of mobility of our students to other European Medical Schools for semester participation. It is hoped that when the system is fully operational up to one third of Maltese medical students in a particular year will participate.



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Mobility programmes for lecturers also exist and all the medical staff are encouraged to participate. This will serve to increase interdepartmental links, encourage excellence in teaching methods and generate participation in research programmes with other centres. Several Universities from Germany, France, Italy, Ireland and United Kingdom have already signed such co-operation agreements and it is hoped that in the very near future other similar agreements will be signed with the Catholic University of Louvain, the Free University of Amsterdam and the University of Cambridge.

Whilst the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery has traditionally catered for undergraduate education, it cannot but look

forward to encourage and influence postgraduate education and training. The new Health Professions Act defines the role of postgraduate training as the realm of the Specialist Associations under the auspices of the Specialist Advisory Committee. However the Faculty feels that it is duty bound to offer tangible support to these Societies in terms of training and to develop and encourage Continuing Postgraduate Education. I can only see good progress in the future being made by the bilateral co-operation and support between the Faculty and these Specialist Associations.

As a Faculty, we have always been held in high regard. This is the result of long years of sound tradition, hard work and excellence in delivery. The same high standards are expected for the future in terms of academic achievements. In administrative terms one would hope that in the near future we would achieve a higher degree of autonomy with the Medical School being run by its own independent administrative and financial staff albeit all answerable to the higher university authorities.

The Medical School currently incorporates the Faculty of Medicine & Surgery and the Faculty of Dental Surgery. The wisdom of continuing with two separate Faculties has long been debated. It is now becoming increasingly clear that although the Faculties differ significantly in size they run parallel to each other as they share similar needs and aspirations and therefore a merger between the two Faculties would appear to be the logical conclusion.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Editor of the Malta Medical Journal and all the team for their hard work and I wish them every success for the future.