

Health and the Economy

A Statement of Concern

Simon Attard Montalto, Stephen Brincat, Joseph M Cacciottolo,
Albert Fenech, Godfrey LaFerla, Alexander Manché

The relationship between health and the economy is an intimate and complex one. The economy of health and the apportioning of funds to different medical services and health care programs are issues that depend on the health profile of a given community as well as the expectations of its members. Decisions ultimately depend on available resources and political priorities.

Health and the economy cannot be isolated and contrasted, as the integrity of a given economic system clearly depends on the state of health of the community both at an individual level as well as at a population level.

One could take a blinkered view, and be blind to anything but a full till at the end of the day, only bothering with health when one is unable to laugh one's way to the bank. The perspective taken by captains of industry is a wider one. They are convinced of the impact of health on the economy and much is invested by industry to promote and preserve health among the workforce.

There is no need anymore to convince anyone of the deleterious effect of smoking on health. The evidence that smoking severely harms the health of smokers and those around them is overwhelming, and is only doubted purposely by front-men of the tobacco industry.

Dr Simon Attard Montalto

Chairman, Department of Paediatrics
St Luke's Hospital, Gwardamangia, Malta

Dr Stephen Brincat

Chairman, Department of Oncology
Sir Paul Boffa Hospital, Floriana, Malta

Professor Joseph M Cacciottolo *

Consultant Respiratory Physician
St Luke's Hospital, Gwardamangia, Malta
Email: joseph.m.cacciottolo@um.edu.mt

Professor Albert Fenech

Chairman, Department of Cardiac Services
St Luke's Hospital, Gwardamangia, Malta

Professor Godfrey LaFerla

Dean, Faculty of Medicine and Surgery
University of Malta, Msida, Malta

Mr Alexander Manché

Consultant Cardiothoracic Surgeon
St Luke's Hospital, Gwardamangia, Malta

* *corresponding author*

It is a matter of concern for us to consider harm that is inflicted by tobacco smoking and related diseases upon the Maltese Community. Tobacco smoking is often equated with death from tobacco related diseases. This is, however, only part of the picture: less well known but more widespread is the progressive harm that these diseases cause to health. The disability, the loss of quality of life, the pain of those afflicted and their loved ones and the hurt of loss are usually borne discreetly and are often unquantifiable. For the woman who is a respiratory cripple because of burnt-out lungs and for the man who suffers a slow death because of heart failure, stopping smoking ceases to be an option: they simply cannot draw breath to smoke anymore.

Citizens have rights and responsibilities; a right to take up or perpetrate the legal habit of smoking and a responsibility to protect themselves and others from disease. Responsibility for personal health rests with the individual but experience teaches us that this is sadly lacking when it comes to other people's health. Government anti-smoking legislation is designed to protect the innocent passive smoker, including the yet unborn, from the real dangers of tobacco smoke.

Recent legislation banning smoking in the work place has not only protected non-smokers but has reduced the quantity of cigarettes consumed. We strongly support the Government of Malta in its efforts to curb smoking as declared public policy. We encourage the Ministry of Health to implement the remainder of the Law pertaining to smoking in public places of leisure according to the time-table agreed.

Editorial Comment

Tobacco related disease constitutes as great a challenge to public health policy makers and healthcare providers as drug abuse, communicable diseases such as HIV infection and chronic non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and obesity. The consequences of exposure to tobacco and the ramifications on a personal, social and economic level cannot be easily quantified. The Malta Medical Journal fully endorses and supports the above statement and the Government of Malta in its proposal to pass legislation to ban smoking in public places.

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