



# QUALITY ASSURANCE

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Suddenly it seems that the Medical Profession in Malta has discovered Quality Assurance. It is not that the individual medical practitioner has not in the past striven to perform well or that there has been any indication that he has lacked the fire in the belly to pursue knowledge and improve his expertise.

The concept of Quality Assurance refers more specifically to the process of objectifying and clearly enunciating our goals, and providing means of assessing the outcomes. It is this latter element which has been lacking in the Maltese milieu.

A recent conference on "Quality of Health Care in Malta - The Way Ahead" organised by the Medical Association of Malta is indeed such an attempt to bring to the fore and highlight the need for such a critical assessment for practice in an objective and transparent way.

The four fundamental elements of Quality Assurance relate to: professional performance, resource utilisation, risk management and not least, patient satisfaction. While we would all agree that these parameters are necessary for proper provision of health care, it is far more difficult to decide on minimum assessment criteria to ensure satisfactory performance.

Providing the best medical education and Post-Graduate training is only the first step in ensuring professional competence. Continuing medical education represents a life-long commitment to ensure uniformity of practice. The development of clinical practice guidelines is recommended in order to ensure appropriate use of rapidly increasing technology, ensure cost effectiveness, continue to validate clinical theory as well as set up databases required for comparative analysis.

The attempt to measure and monitor hospital use is encompassed under the concept of "Utilisation Management" which essentially deals with standards and appropriateness of performance as well as ensuring that actions are initiated to modify those procedures which do not come up to scratch.

Where do we start? Such a complex undertaking cannot be achieved through wishful thinking. It represents a serious commitment on the part of all concerned and

particularly the Medical Profession as well as the Health Authorities. It involves a mental readjustment to our way of doing business and a readiness on our part to be prepared to discuss openly our practices. It involves participation in the process of clinical audit. It requires the humility of accepting a consensus view point, unless we can prove that our particular methods are superior to everybody else's.

None of this comes cheaply; Quality Assurance programmes represent a distinct and increasing cost to medical practice. The provision of personnel, updating of equipment, upgrading of those particular areas of practice which are usually conveniently forgotten such as the medical record departments or the post mortem room all represent a commitment which may not be popular or particularly vote catching.

In the final analysis the aim is to provide a practice of medicine of which the medical profession in Malta could be proud and of which the patient may be said to be truly satisfied.

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