

Brave New Hospital

(Apologies to Aldous Huxley)

The migration to Mater Dei Hospital, our state of the art healthcare facility, has been completed. On the 19th of November 2007 the first acutely ill patients were admitted through the emergency department at Mater Dei Hospital! Those involved in the planning and execution of the migration deserve thanks and recognition for their hard work and endeavours in ensuring as smooth a migration as possible .

A new chapter in the history of medicine in Malta has been opened. The building which now houses acute medical care is spacious, well lit, and finished to high specifications. Patients have more privacy and comfort in their rooms. The environment is clean, rooms are quiet, the catering good. Automation and the introduction of IT systems aimed at an eventual paperless hospital require training of staff in the use of such systems as well as backup facilities, round the clock servicing and maintenance. It is to be expected that it will take some time till all is in place and the necessary fine tuning completed. The stress that is generated by such a major move is considerable as staff, patients and relatives alike have to accustom themselves to the new environment

Members of staff have gone beyond the call of duty in helping ensure that the hospital functions as optimally as possible at such a crucial time of change. This drives home once again the fact that, whilst architectural design and technology are all well and good, human resources have been and will continue to be the most valuable resource Mater Dei has to offer those who are ill and in need of medical care.

Miranda in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* might well exclaim:

“O wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is!
O brave new world
That has such people in't!”

should she have had the opportunity to visit St Luke's and Mater Dei Hospital over the last few weeks.

It is essential that policy makers and administrators recognise this both in the process of maintaining quality of care at Mater Dei Hospital and when planning future development and expansion of health care services. The establishment of the intermediate care and rehabilitation facility at St Luke's Hospital has been instrumental in enabling the transfer to Mater Dei. The staff there are to be lauded for their handling of what has undoubtedly been a difficult and trying time. It is likely that these units will be called upon to handle an ever increasing number of patients primarily as a result of an increasing proportion of the population being elderly. The advances in medicine that decrease mortality and promote longevity and the explosion in the prevalence of chronic non-communicable diseases continue to strain the healthcare budget. This particular sector of healthcare needs an infusion of personnel and funds to enable expansion of services. It is to be borne in mind that Mater Dei Hospital with its current number of beds and outpatient facilities can only truly function as an acute medical care facility and tertiary referral centre if the necessary community and intermediate care facilities are in place. To achieve this again a commitment to nurturing and expanding our human resources is mandatory.

An institution with a key role in human resource development is the University of Malta Medical School. This has migrated from its previous location to Mater Dei Hospital and students now attend lectures, seminars, rounds and tutorials at the new hospital. As the number of students continue to increase, as medical education continues to face the challenges of preparing graduates for changing environments and demands on a local, European and global level, then the medical school will need to continue to expand and grow. Its commitment to both undergraduate and postgraduate education is clearly in evidence with the decision to expand the MSc and PhD programmes and to support post graduate specialist training by lending its resources at Mater Dei Hospital and the old Medical School to such endeavours. The future of medical education and of healthcare in Malta promises to be a challenging and exciting time. The dedication and innovation that have been the hallmark of our Medical School and our University will undoubtedly stand us in good stead.

Josanne Vassallo
Editor