

Editorial

The Malta Medical School Conference

Carmel Mallia

The next Malta Medical School Conference, the ninth one in the series, is being held towards the end of 2015.

The original idea of a regular medical conference started in the early 1970s when the then “Association of Surgeons and Physicians of Malta” used to organize a yearly meeting – quite a modest affair - held in the Conference Room of the Medical School in Pietá, attracting about 40-50 doctors, mainly consultants and other hospital doctors and some general practitioners. After 1977 this activity was disrupted for several years and the concept of a Medical School Conference was born about 25 years ago, the idea being the brainchild of Prof. Frederick Fenech, then Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, and of Dr. Joseph Pace then Chairman of the Postgraduate Medical Education Committee. The aim was to establish a triennial multi-disciplinary conference with material presented by graduates of the Medical School of Malta, practising both locally and overseas. Representatives of the various Royal Colleges and Postgraduate Medical Centres of Excellence were also invited. The First Malta Medical School Conference was held at the Suncrest Hotel, Qawra, on 15-16th December 1989: it was an unqualified success. It is worth recalling comments that were sent to the local organizers by some of the foreign visitors:

“.... A two days’ scientific meeting exclusively conducted by Maltese doctors. I have seldom been to a wide-ranging symposium of such sustained excellence. I was left marvelling at so much medical distinction deriving from such a small population.” (the late Prof. J. Richmond, then President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh)

“....I thoroughly enjoyed the Conference which was brilliantly organized and a magnificent success” (Prof. R.B. Cole School of Postgraduate Medicine, University of Keele)

“....It was a most rewarding experience; the organization of such a large and complex meeting was beyond criticism and I felt that the presentations were of a consistently high standard.” (Prof. J. Anderson, Dean, Postgraduate Institute for Medicine and Dentistry, Newcastle upon Tyne)

It may have seemed that the first Malta Medical School Conference set a standard that would be difficult to emulate. However the success of this first conference was reproduced in all successive ones - thanks, in no small measure, to the hard work of the different organizing committees of the various conferences, as well as the scientific contributions and overall participation. I feel privileged to have been a member of the committees of the first four and Chairman of the seventh Malta Medical School Conference. It was a pleasure working with so many different colleagues whose sole purpose was to ensure the success of the conference. One characteristic quality that was present throughout was the enthusiasm displayed by all who were involved in the meeting – starting with the support of the respective Deans of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, committee members, secretarial staff, sponsors, pharmaceutical exhibitors, medical student helpers and many others. If I had to single out one particular person for a special word of recognition it would be Mr. Charles Borg Galea who was in charge of the (one-man) audio-visual department at the Medical School for many years. In the days before Power-Point, Mr. Borg Galea would prepare all the 35 mm transparencies for all presentations: despite the ‘strict’ deadlines he used to impose, many would still hand in their work very late, and several of us would go back having noticed some mistakes in our original material. We must have tried his patience to the limit – but he always delivered on time. He was also responsible for the audio-visual services during the conference, initially practically

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single-handed.

All editions of the conference attracted Maltese Medical/Dental School graduates who achieved high standards in their countries of adoption. They included, among others, Professor Sir Alfred Cuschieri, one of the pioneers of keyhole surgery, Professor George Zarb, (Professor of Dentistry, University of Toronto), Professor Michael Camilleri, (Professor of Medicine and Physiology, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota), Professor Anthony Busuttill, (Emeritus Professor of Forensic Medicine, University of Edinburgh), Dr. Joseph DeGiovanni, (Consultant Cardiologist University Hospital, Birmingham), and Dr. Joseph Coleiro, (Consultant Ophthalmologist Ninewells Hospital, Dundee, Scotland).

The Malta Medical School Conference has retained its original format namely, that of a multi-disciplinary meeting which covers a wide spectrum of the various medical/surgical specialties. Papers submitted by Maltese medical graduates practising locally or overseas complement keynote speeches by experienced clinicians and academicians, both local and foreign. This way doctors working in different disciplines are exposed to other branches of medicine that are not their main area of interest. There has always been an excellent response in terms of scientific contributions to the conference, with the number of submitted papers increasing with every conference, the latest two conferences receiving over 450 papers. This confirms the continuing and, indeed, the ever-growing popularity of the conference. The request for oral – as opposed to poster – presentations is much higher than can be accommodated. This always renders the task of the adjudicating Scientific sub-Committee very difficult. Short of having more parallel sessions (which partly defeats the scope of the conference) or a longer conference (which poses major logistical problems) the various committees constantly try to find ways of giving posters a more prominent place in the conference. The Scientific Committee tries to encourage participants by accepting most of the abstracts that are submitted, but the time has come when more effective pruning has become necessary so as to ensure the high standards that the Conference has achieved.

The number of delegates at the conference continues to increase – numbers now reaching about 700. While this is partly due to the generous support of the Faculty of Medicine in subsidizing the attendance of clinical students, the number of doctors attending the meeting is also increasing. The organizing committees always do their utmost to draw up a programme that is of interest to all who attend the meeting.

Like its predecessors, the 8th Malta Medical School Conference was a major success. The Chairman of the Conference was Dr. Raymond Galea, who has, once again, been entrusted with the next edition of the

Conference. I am sure that Dr. Galea, with his energy and infectious enthusiasm, together with his organizing committee, will maintain the tradition of staging a very successful conference that is generally looked upon as a showpiece of our Medical School. I augur Dr. Galea and his co-workers every success.

Cover Picture:

'Nude'

Acrylics on board.

By Carol J. Jaccarini

Carol J. Jaccarini graduated MD from the Royal University of Malta in 1961. Trained in Paediatrics in the United Kingdom, qualified DCH Lond (1966), MRCP UK (1969), FRCP Lond (1985), and was Consultant Paediatrician at St Luke's Hospital between 1975 and 1978. Since then he has carried on with private practice in Paediatrics. Tutored for 8 years by artist Anton Calleja, he paints mainly in acrylics and is a regular contributor in collective art exhibitions.