

INSTITUTE OF HEALTH CARE - FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES (1987-2013): A CELEBRATION

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Abstract. The Institute of Health Care embarked on its mission of training health care professionals at the University of Malta in 1987. A degree programme in Nursing Studies was the first course offered by the Institute of Health Care. By expanding steadily to provide training opportunities in a variety of allied health professions, the Institute of Health Care attracted increasing numbers of students over its 25 years of existence. This paper provides a brief historical account of the developments that led to the founding of the Institute of Health Care and to its subsequent upgrade to the Faculty of Health Sciences in August 2010. It also traces the advancement of the Institute of Health Care's individual professional divisions as they grew into faculty departments and expanded their teaching and research portfolios. A key contributor to the Institute of Health Care's success was the dedication and commitment of its teaching staff, a factor which continues to support the Faculty of Health Sciences in its ongoing mission.

1 Introduction

The Institute of Health Care (IHC) was founded in 1987. Its inception was triggered by the author's appointment as Parliamentary Secretary for Elderly Affairs, with an additional special portfolio of Medical and Health Education and Training. Backed by a long experience in hospital and other health care services, the author recognised the importance of professional training for nurses and other allied health professionals. This perception prompted him to propose the foundation of an institute within the University of Malta that would enable the local allied health workforce to keep abreast with the very rapid and remarkable advances that were happening in the field of health care. This recommendation led to the launch of the IHC, a rather bold venture that was not fully appreciated at the time. Nonetheless, the Institute embarked on its mission of training health care professionals with dedication and optimism, unfailingly supported by the late Rev. Professor Peter Serracino Inglott, who was Rector of the University. For the first few years of its existence, the IHC operated from a room within the Department of Pharmacy at the University campus. Professor Anthony Serracino Inglott was the IHC's first director.

An undergraduate degree programme in Nursing Studies was

the first course to be offered by the IHC. In the Maltese Islands, the recruitment of students for nursing courses had always been difficult. During the 19th and earlier part of the 20th century, nursing had a poor image in the Maltese Islands for people other than those with a religious vocation. Nursing in the state hospitals was dominated by the Sisters of Charity, who came to Malta in 1870. Usually, there were two or three Sisters in each ward, so that highly educated lay nurses had very few opportunities to develop their capabilities and advancement in the hospital services. As a result, training in nursing was not an attractive prospect for young people. The dedicated work and presence of the Sisters in the state hospitals lasted for over a century until the 1970s, when their numbers began to diminish because of lack of vocations.

The St Luke's Hospital Training School for Nurses was officially opened during the latter part of 1947 under the distinguished leadership of Sister Aldegonda Farrugia, a Sister of Charity. Sister Aldegonda was the first Registered Nurse in Malta and the first Maltese nursing tutor. The nurses who were trained at the School for Nurses were to become the nursing staff of the state hospitals, without whose tutoring services the IHC would have been unable to provide novel undergraduate nursing training. Moreover, the difficult historical background of nursing in Malta was a deterrent for young people to train in the field. Student recruitment was made more difficult following the launch of several new courses at the University. Despite these difficulties, a decision was taken in 1987 by the author and his collaborators to formally give recognition to the nurse as a professional member of the health care team. The introduction of the B.Sc. (Honours) programme in 'Nursing Studies' at the IHC marked the rise in status of nursing to a profession.

During the summer of 1987, a delegation led by the author visited a number of universities in England and Scotland. As a result, a link was formally established with the University of Liverpool, thanks to Professor Herbert Gillies, a renowned professor in the School of Tropical Medicine at the University of Liverpool. The late Professor Kate Morle was Head of the Nursing Studies Department. As a consequence of this link, the IHC was fortunate to have Ms Barbara Burkey as the first Coordinator of the Nursing Studies Division. After setting up the new B.Sc. (Honours) course in Nursing Studies for newcomers to the profession, Ms Burkey also proceeded to develop an undergraduate degree programme for qualified staff, together with a number of other courses, among which were the following:

- a Diploma in Nursing and Midwifery for qualified staff
- a Diploma in Psychiatric Nursing for qualified staff
- a diploma to degree programme in Nursing and Midwifery
- a Certificate in Nursing Practice course
- a Return to Nursing course for the 60 to 70 nurses at Zammit Clapp Hospital who had been away from nursing for many years

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- a Supervising and Assessing course for qualified staff
- a Nurse Tutors course for lecturing staff on the IHC's Nursing programmes
- a post qualification diploma to master's programme in Nursing and Midwifery Education.

The implementation of these various programmes during the early days of the IHC was made possible by adopting a 'snakes and ladders system' which utilised all available talents and avoided wastage. Through this system, students who failed their course could pursue nursing training at a lower level, with the opportunity of progressing again to a higher level of nursing. Several nurses went through this process successfully. Ms Burkey also set up a Nursing Development Unit within the IHC, which exposed nursing students to the ideal ward setting.

Ms Burkey made an invaluable contribution to nursing and midwifery education. She also offered her full support for multidisciplinary developments in the IHC. She left her mark on nursing and midwifery practice in Malta by unflinchingly promoting the professional image of nursing and the quality of care given to health service consumers.

Ms Burkey's successors, Ms Isabel Avallone, Ms Grace Jaccarini and Dr Roberta Sammut, together with their lecturing and administrative staff, continued to enlarge and develop the Nursing Division. By the year 2000, a growing interest in nursing studies courses became apparent. Soon after, the Nursing Division was to become inundated with a steady flow of applicants.

Following the IHC's upgrade to faculty status, the Department of Nursing continued to expand with Dr Roberta Sammut at its helm. The Department of Nursing is by far the largest department in the Faculty of Health Sciences, with 809 students currently following its various programmes in general, community and mental health nursing. 523 students are currently registered on three full-time courses, with 178 students following the B.Sc. (Honours) Nursing programme, four students following the B.Sc. (Honours) Mental Health Nursing course and 341 students enrolled in the Diploma in Nursing programme. 198 students attend seven part-time courses, including two Ph.D. candidates, 20 M.Sc. in Nursing students and six M.Sc. in Mental Health Nursing students. Additionally, 88 students have enrolled on a range of Continuing Professional Development courses (R. Sammut, personal communication, March 14, 2014). For the last three years, courses in mental health nursing have been run by Mr Martin Ward, an international expert in the field. Today, many members of the nursing profession have obtained higher qualifications at master's and doctoral levels. The nurse has also become clearly established as a professional and a respected member of the health care team. There is now a Directorate of Nursing with a professional nurse as its head.

2 Development and Extension of the Institute of Health Care

The IHC's remit went far beyond the training of professional nurses. Once the Nursing Division was established, the IHC strove to offer opportunities for training in other health care specialties. The following years saw the introduction of programmes in various other areas of study, namely (in alphabetical order) Applied Biomedical Sciences, Communication Therapy, Dental Technology, Food Studies and Environmental Health, Health Services Management, Midwifery, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Podiatry and Radiography. In the IHC's first academic year (1988/89), there was only one student applicant for the Nursing degree programme. During the first few years following the IHC's inception, enrollment in most of the courses continued to be limited. An initiative was therefore undertaken to set up a Pre-Vocational School for Health Care, directed by Mr Anthony E. Azzopardi. This was spurred by the author's realization that a

considerable number of students who had failed their 'O' level examinations in one subject had good grades in the other subjects. Many of these young people had been employed as Health Assistants in the various state hospitals. The Pre-Vocational School gave these students a second chance. The vast majority of students attending the School eventually continued their studies and qualified as health care professionals. A number of these even continued their studies to a degree at bachelor's and master's level. Eventually, the Pre-Vocational School was incorporated within the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology.

A growing interest in the health care professions was eventually witnessed with time. Ten years after the IHC's launch, the number of students registering for the various courses on offer had increased markedly. Growth in student numbers continued to be steady and unrelenting, prompting the introduction of a numerus clausus in some courses to help preserve standards despite the limited facilities available. The IHC's academic and administrative staff worked in unison to support its expansion. Figure 1 shows members of the academic and administrative staff gathered with Mgr Paul Cremona, who visited the IHC on 29th December 2006, shortly before his ordination as Archbishop of Malta. In January 2008, the IHC moved from its premises within St Luke's Hospital to the Education and Management Block within Mater Dei Hospital. Figure 2 shows members of the IHC Board following the last meeting held at the IHC's premises in St Luke's Hospital.

The IHC received faculty status in August 2010, becoming henceforth known as the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS). As a result, divisions were upgraded to departments in the respective fields. In turn, coordinators became departmental heads. The Dental Technology Division was transferred to the Faculty of Dentistry following the upgrade to faculty status. The FHS was therefore established with 10 departments. The Department of Medical Physics, the Faculty's most recent addition, brought up the total number of departments to 11. The next section outlines the development of each of the FHS departments. Most accounts outline personal communications with the respective heads and trace the departments' origins back to the IHC.



Figure 1: *Academic and administrative members of the IHC staff gathered with Mgr Paul Cremona, who visited the IHC on 29th December 2006 prior to his ordination as Archbishop the following month. Seated in the front row, rightmost position, is Mr Jesmond Sharples, a nurse and IHC graduate who had been appointed Director of Nursing Services in the Ministry of Health.*

2.1 Applied Biomedical Science (A. Xuereb, personal communication, March 3, 2014).

The Medical Laboratory Science Division was set up within the IHC in 1992. Initially, it offered a certificate course for techni-



Figure 2: IHC Board members following the last meeting at the IHC's premises at St Luke's Hospital, prior to the move to the new premises at Mater Dei Hospital.

cians working in the Pathology Department at St Luke's Hospital. Eight technicians qualified in 1996. In 1993, a three-year diploma course was started under the direction of Professor Maurice Cauchi and coordinated by Dr Joseph A. Borg. There were 43 diplomates from 1996 to 1999. A degree programme was started in 1992. Professor Angela Xuereb was appointed Coordinator of the degree programme in 1995. Since 1996, there have been 218 graduates.

In 2010, the Division became a Department with the establishment of the FHS. The nomenclature had by then been changed to Applied Biomedical Science. It is headed by Professor Angela Xuereb and is responsible for undergraduate teaching leading to a B.Sc. (Honours) in Applied Biomedical Science. The specific aim of the degree programme is to produce high quality graduates with expertise in all the experimental and routine aspects of a pathology laboratory. Graduates are equipped with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills required for the study and interpretation of pathological processes. They can also work in industry or pursue a career in research.

The Department has an active research programme in areas which include Genetics of Osteoporosis, Inflammation, Atherosclerosis and Myocardial Infarction, Genetics of Tetrahydrobiopterin Deficiencies, as well as Transcriptional Regulation and Control of Globin Gene Expression. The Department is currently expanding its doctoral programme.

In 2013, the Department marked its twentieth anniversary by organizing a symposium, in which a number of students and graduates presented their research. Professor Maurice Cauchi joined the symposium via Skype from Melbourne, Australia.

2.2 Communication Therapy (H. Grech, personal communication, January 19, 2014).

The Communication Therapy Division was the second to form part of the IHC. The B.Sc. (Honours) Communication Therapy programme was launched in October 1991 and has since been offered on a regular basis. This course is geared towards the initial education of generic speech-language pathologists. One hundred and twenty six speech-language pathologists have graduated from the University of Malta after reading for the four-year degree programme. There are currently 60 undergraduate students who are following the Communication Therapy course on a full-time basis.

Besides the undergraduate course, the Department is now offering a postgraduate programme in Audiology leading to a Master of Science degree, besides the Ph.D. programme. The Department was the first within the FHS to have presented the successful com-

pletion of its doctoral students. The Department has also catered for the provision of refresher and updating courses for qualified practitioners, as part of a professional development programme.

The Departmental staff members are actively engaged in research that covers a range of topics related to the acquisition of human communication and its disorders, especially in connection with the Maltese bilingual population. Departmental research to date has focused on the development and standardization of novel diagnostic assessments to identify local children with speech, verbal/written language and auditory processing difficulties. One interesting small-scale project is related to gelotophobia and stuttering; other studies are related to lexical skills in monolingual and bilingual young children.

The Department has also been actively engaged and a partner in the European Speech Language Therapy Consortium through which it has benefited from staff and student participation in Summer Intensive Programmes. Departmental staff members have also been appointed academic advisors/examiners by other universities and received the International Student Prize for Excellence in Research. More recently, the Head of Department, Professor Helen Grech, was appointed President of the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics (IALP). IALP has 58 Affiliated Societies as well as individual members from all continents of the world.

2.3 Food Studies and Environmental Health (A. McElhatton, personal communication, January 11, 2014).

The Environmental Health Science Division, directed by Professor Victor Ferrito, was set up within the IHC in the early 1990s. It had the remit to run courses in environmental health to train health inspectors. The course on offer was an undergraduate diploma programme. The introduction of a 'top-up' mechanism in the mid-1990s enabled diploma holders to take modules over a period of two years on a part-time basis to obtain a degree. There were some twelve odd students who took up this option. It unfortunately failed to garner enough interest to reach greater student numbers. A change in University policy led to its discontinuation. During the same period, a part-time master's degree in food-related areas of environmental health was offered. Again, student registration was low and the programme was discontinued. An undergraduate degree programme was offered twice in the mid-1990s, but this also was discontinued due to poor student uptake. Throughout this time, the diploma course was run regularly.

In the mid-1990s, the Division was asked to run modules in nutrition for qualified health care workers. These modules were grouped and presented as a Post Qualification Diploma in Nutrition and Dietetics, which in 2002 was rebranded as a Postgraduate Diploma in Nutrition and Dietetics. There had been ongoing discussions with the Department of Health to introduce new courses in environmental health as well as nutrition and dietetics since the early 2000s. However, the teaching staff complement was insufficient. A new coordinator, Dr Anna McElhatton, was appointed in 2007. With the establishment of the FHS, the Division became the Department of Food Studies and Environmental Health. In 2010, the Department doubled its resident full-time staff complement with academics specializing in food science and nutrition so that the full-time academics became four. A degree programme in Applied Food and Nutritional Sciences was successfully launched in 2012.

Since 2010, the Department has been placing an emphasis on research, which has resulted in a gradual increase in postgraduate research students. There are currently four Ph.D. candidates and a master's student within the Department. Staff members' research interests include food safety, healthy food perception and choice, as well as water standards and safety. The Department is

involved in several EU thematic networks and seeks to increase the numbers of both undergraduate students and postgraduate candidates reading degrees by research.

2.4 Health Services Management (S. Buttigieg, personal communication, March 2, 2014).

The Health Services Management Division was established within the IHC in 1993 with a first intake of students following a diploma course. This programme was introduced after the successful course in health services management for senior staff of the Department of Health in Malta run by the Health Services Management Centre of the University of Birmingham. The regulations for the local course were amended when a US Peace Corps Volunteer, Ms Patricia Brooks, became the acting coordinator of the programme. The diploma course was upgraded to a master's programme in 2006. Professor Mark O'Callaghan and later Dr Natasha Azzopardi Muscat coordinated the course before Dr Sandra Buttigieg took over as Coordinator in 2007, then as Head of Department when the IHC became a faculty.

The first cohort of master's students graduated in 1997 after four years, the first two years of which covered a post-qualification diploma. Since then, the master's programme in Health Services Management has consistently attracted a multidisciplinary cohort from the various health care professions. Graduates include doctors, pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers, applied biomedical scientists, nurses and midwives.

2.5 Medical Physics (C. J. Caruana, personal communication, March 2, 2014).

The Medical Physics Unit, previously part of the Department of Radiography, was upgraded to a Department within the FHS in 2013. Headed by Professor Carmel J. Caruana, its mission is to help develop young physicists or engineers to fulfill the role of clinical medical physicist working in the hospital environment, or research medical physicist employed in research laboratories or the biomedical device industry. Clinical medical physicists contribute to maintaining and improving the quality, safety and cost-effectiveness of healthcare services through expert action, involvement or advice regarding the specification, selection, acceptance testing, commissioning, quality assurance and optimised clinical use of medical devices and protection from associated physical agents such as ionizing radiation and magnetic fields. The role of research-oriented medical physicists is much wider. Here, physics concepts, theories and methods are used to enhance the understanding and development of clinical practice as well as experimental medicine. It would include physics based aspects of life science research that would have a future impact on healthcare e.g. advanced microscopy, nanodevices, biomolecular structure, cell biology physics. The Department offers a master's course in Medical Physics and is a prime actor in the development of medical physics curricula at the European level.

2.6 Midwifery (R. Borg Xuereb, personal communication, January 22, 2014).

There are documented records of midwifery practice in Malta dating back to the 16th century. The Medical and Kindred Professions Act of 1901 regulated the midwifery profession together with that of doctors and apothecaries. The School of Midwifery was placed on a sound footing in 1915 when the course of midwifery was set up under the auspices of the University of Malta,

leading to a diploma in Midwifery. The School of Midwifery reverted to the Medical and Health Department in 1946, and was again closed within a few years. In the 1950s and 60s, a small number of nurses were sent to the United Kingdom to train as midwives. The School for Midwives was reopened in 1970 under the leadership of Ms Elizabeth Thompson and eventually Ms Mary Vella Bondin. This course was planned on the UK's system in the training of midwives. The students had to be qualified nurses with at least six months nursing experience prior to commencing the programme.

When the IHC was set up, midwifery and nursing studies formed one division known as the Nursing and Midwifery Division. Nevertheless, each profession had its own curriculum and its own lecturers. In 1990, Midwifery was offered as a direct entry undergraduate diploma course. This was discontinued in 2002 to make way to a direct entry degree programme, with the first graduates qualifying as midwives in 2006. The first master's degree programme opened in 2004. The Division of Midwifery was set up in 2009. This was upgraded to a Department when the FHS was established in 2010. At present, 60 students are reading for a degree in Midwifery, while three students are pursuing their studies at master's level. In addition, four midwives within the Department are reading for a Ph.D. with overseas universities in collaboration with the University of Malta. Erasmus exchange programmes have also become very popular and at present the Department of Midwifery holds agreements with a number of European universities. The Department's hosting of European and international conferences shows that it has gained recognition among overseas institutions and networks.

2.7 Occupational Therapy (R. Mifsud, personal communication, January 29, 2014).

Occupational Therapy was formally introduced to the Maltese Islands in 1956 when two British therapists started to provide a service at St Luke's Hospital to in- and out-patients with orthopaedic conditions. This arrangement continued up to the late 1960s when the expatriate occupational therapists resigned from their posts and left the island, despite formal plans to expand services. In view of the growing need for occupational therapy provision, the Government decided to establish a local workforce. The first call for applications for the recruitment of Maltese students was made in 1970. In 1971, the Medical and Health Department sent the two selected applicants for training at the London School of Occupational Therapy. Mr Joe Busuttill and Mr Mario Scicluna qualified in 1974. These pioneering Maltese occupational therapists set up two clinics, a physical disabilities clinic at St. Luke's Hospital, which also offered part-time services at St. Vincent de Paule Residence for the Elderly, and a mental health clinic at Mount Carmel Hospital. In 1979, a second cohort of Maltese students was sent to the United Kingdom for training at the London and Derby schools of occupational therapy. With more staff qualifying in 1982, the profession could branch out in different areas of practice, thus setting up occupational therapy on a more stable basis in the major hospitals. Nonetheless, the shortage in the staff complement was still very acute.

In line with developments in other health care professions, a move was made to establish occupational therapy education in Malta. In 1984, Mr. Joe Busuttill obtained a post-graduate qualification and set up a local occupational therapy school, which launched its first course programme in October of the same year, under the auspices of the Department of Health. By 1992, the Occupational Therapy Division had been set up within the IHC. Diploma programmes were held between 1992 and 1994, with the last intake graduating in 1998. In the mid-1990s, the courses earned recognition by the World Federation of Occupational Therapy.

The academic profile of the Division changed radically as most staff members undertook postgraduate courses in the United Kingdom. An intensive collaboration with a visiting Fulbright Scholar, Professor Anne McRae from San Jose' State University, followed. These developments led to the first undergraduate degree course being offered in 1999, spearheaded by the efforts of Mr René Mifsud and a dynamic team of young academics. In Malta, occupational therapy provides assessments, intervention programmes, consultancy and education to a very diverse range of client populations and age groups. Although staffing is still critical, the profession is now well-established and provides a range of hospital-, clinic- and community-based services.

2.8 Physiotherapy.

Sacco (2008) provides a detailed account of the beginnings of physiotherapy in Malta and the chronology of events leading to current professional training opportunities. The physiotherapy profession was introduced in Malta in March 1943, when Professor Herbert John Seddon (1903-1977), Nuffield Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at Oxford, who was a world authority on poliomyelitis, was appointed advisor to the Medical and Health Department of Malta during the poliomyelitis outbreak of November 1942 - March 1943. Professor Seddon submitted schemes for the establishment of an Orthopaedic Department and a Physiotherapy Department.

In August 1943, a special Ward for Physiotherapy was opened in Bugeja Hospital, which was the main hospital for surgery during World War II. Arrangements were also made to send four Maltese women to train in the United Kingdom in Massages and Physiotherapy. Of these, Ms Rose D'Amato was the first Maltese physiotherapist to practise in Malta. Throughout the next three decades, there was only a very small number of physiotherapists working in the state hospitals.

The first local diploma course organised by the Medical and Health Department commenced in 1976 with 22 students. Ms Mary Patricia Ralph-Smith, an English physiotherapist, was the tutor. By 1977, the physiotherapy students were clinically effective and physiotherapy services became available to the elderly in the state geriatric hospitals. The second local diploma course organised by the Department of Health commenced in 1982, and by its final year, Mr Mark Sacco became the tutor and coordinator. Further courses were organised for the Department of Health in 1985 and 1989. Their standard was found to be at par with those of the United Kingdom following assessment by external examiners. Students qualifying from the Malta School of Physiotherapy were automatically accepted for recognition by the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine in the United Kingdom.

In 1992, physiotherapy was incorporated in the IHC and the diploma course previously offered was upgraded to an undergraduate degree. Since its launch, the degree programme has been offered on a yearly basis, with a total of 278 students commencing the course. Increasing numbers of applicants for the degree programme evidence its popularity among students. Accordingly, the teaching staff complement has grown from one in 1992 to three full-time and five part-time academics. Dr Mark Sacco heads the Department.

2.9 Podiatry (C. Formosa, personal communication, March 2, 2014).

The Podiatry Division, coordinated by Mr Andrew P. Scicluna, was established within the IHC in 1994. It initially offered a diploma course. The first seven graduates qualified in 1997, followed by eight others in 1998 and four others in 1999. The course was later upgraded to a B.Sc. (Honours) degree with 10 students graduating in 2009, followed by 11 in 2010 and 10 in 2012. The degree programme is designed to equip students with the theoretical knowledge and clinical experience necessary to pursue a career

as podiatrists and clinical researchers.

The professionalism and dedication of the Department's teaching staff is a crucial element that has contributed to its success. Headed by Dr Cynthia Formosa, the Department of Podiatry is actively involved in research, with its staff members publishing their work in leading podiatric and medical journals and participating in international conferences. The fields of interest of the Department include clinical biomechanics, diabetes, geriatrics, organizational management and change. There are currently three full-time members of staff within the Department. Two members of staff currently hold a Ph.D. in Diabetes Mellitus Management (University of Brighton) and Clinical Biomechanics (Staffordshire University). One other member of staff is currently reading for a Ph.D. at Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom.

The Department also enjoys international collaborations with other schools of podiatry. A number of external lecturers are regularly invited to deliver modules in specialised areas such as podiatric surgery and podiatric podo-paediatrics, in order to enrich the course programme.

2.10 Radiography (P. Bezzina, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

Radiography education was established in Malta in the late 1970s with a training course coordinated by Dr Fortunato Zammit, held under the auspices of the Department of Health. Previously, radiographers were trained in the United Kingdom at government expense. Although several courses were set up during the next two decades, the numbers of qualifying radiographers were insufficient to cope with the demands of the population. Indeed, the Department of Health expressed concern that the number of radiographers available would not be sufficient to provide an expansion of the service. The then Chief Radiographer had written to the Chief Government Medical Officer in June 1987, stating that more radiographers were urgently required for the service:

"The total number of qualified radiographers engaged in the diagnostic work, including those at Craig Hospital and the Polyclinics now stands at 20 basic grade and 1 chief radiographer. This is far below the projected total of 59. Taking into account the heavy radiographers' wastage rate and the student drop out rate, in my opinion, the next group should not consist of less than 16".

A call for applications was then published on 10th July 1987 but only two students applied. Permission was sought and obtained to issue a second call, which was published on 6th October 1987. The situation became more precarious as there were no applications for this call and permission was again obtained to issue a fresh call for applications. Drastic measures were being made at that time to attract people to health care. The 'A' level entry requirement was removed and applicants could now join the course based on an 'O' level standard of education. The lowering of entry qualifications was not restricted to radiography courses only but to other health care courses, such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy.

At the time the IHC was launched, there were very few radiographers to operate the X-Ray equipment in St Luke's Hospital. A diploma programme was launched by the Radiography Division within the IHC in 1993, but this attracted very few applicants. Students successfully completing the course numbered three in 1997, two in 1998, seven in 2000, eight in 2002 and six in 2003. Meanwhile, the radiography profession was quickly evolving, with various branches emerging beyond the traditional X-Rays. Technological developments were constantly taking place in the two main branches, diagnostic imaging and radiotherapy, the latter also referred to as radiation treatment. Both modes require the radiographer to have a high level of theoretical knowledge and clinical ability. In view of these advances in the profession, the diploma course in radiography was upgraded to an undergraduate

degree programme. A post qualification diploma course was also offered. This was eventually replaced by a master's degree course. To date, a total of 150 students have qualified in the undergraduate course and nine students in the master's course. Headed by Dr Paul Bezzina, the Department of Radiography recently introduced a joint B.Sc. (Honours) programme in Radiography and Radiotherapy in partnership with Cardiff University. This course will provide the health service with radiographers able to work in the two branches of radiology - diagnostic and therapeutic - in support of the government's intention to develop cancer treatment.

3 Conclusion

The IHC grew in stature and beyond recognition during its existence, developing into a worthy predecessor to the FHS which, in turn, has continued to expand. Over the last 10 to 15 years in particular, a greater emphasis was placed on research as part of the formation of the academic staff members, assisting them in attaining postgraduate qualifications at master's and doctoral levels. The greater part of the lecturing staff succeeded in obtaining postgraduate qualifications without neglecting their teaching commitments. This proved to be an investment in the IHC's training and research potential. As the IHC embarked on its mission, it had very few teaching staff in possession of postgraduate degrees. It was therefore inevitable that it depended heavily on foreign experts to teach on its various programmes. The staff members of the IHC and FHS must be congratulated for their commitment to the advancement of the various disciplines. Through their dedication, training in the health care professions is no longer dependent on foreign teachers. This fact must be recorded as the greatest achievement of the IHC and the FHS in line with the most urgent of the IHC's targets, namely to achieve excellence in the education and training of reflective, caring and accountable health professionals, in response to health and health service needs of the population. This target was stated in the mission statement that motivated the IHC's birth 25 years ago.

At present, 10 out of the 11 departments within the FHS have members of staff in possession of a Ph.D. The FHS is currently the second largest faculty at the University of Malta, with over 1,300 students. Altogether, 3,803 students graduated from the IHC and the FHS at certificate, diploma and degree (undergraduate and postgraduate) levels to date. Postgraduate degrees ranged from postgraduate diploma to master's and Ph.D. levels. All of this is reason enough to celebrate the IHC and the FHS, the University of Malta's centre for educating and training allied health professionals.

4 Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the directors of the IHC, Professor Anthony Serracino Inglott, Dr Gauden Galea, Dr Sandra Buttigieg and Professor Angela Xuereb, the present Dean of the FHS, and all the teaching and administrative staff for making the IHC and FHS's success story possible.

I would also like to convey a special thank you to the very few students who joined the IHC's first Nursing Studies programme and motivated it to pursue its goal of giving a new dimension to training in health care professions.

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