

Humanities and Medical Science - HUMS: a novel Programme at the University of Malta

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Medical practice and the health sciences have the well-being of mankind as their essential focus and their aim is to promote and protect health, to heal when possible, and always to limit harm and alleviate suffering. Practitioners of the medical and health sciences not only look upon their competences and attitudes as both science and art, but despite an often necessary professional detachment, many are often introspective about the human condition and the wider dimensions and implications of their practice.

Scholars of the humanities, are interested in the many facets of the human experience. Health, disease and death are all essential features of the human experience and the study of medical humanities as an academic discipline, although a relative newcomer to

many Universities, is rapidly gaining ground. The discipline has broken many traditional barriers between seemingly disparate areas of study and involves collaboration between scholars with diverse backgrounds.

The Humanities and Medical Science

(HUMS) Programme at the University of Malta, is a novel forum for scholars interested in medical humanities and aims to draw upon the intellectual strengths of several disciplines. It is intended as a series of veritable bridges between different intellectual endeavours. The Programme proposes to explore and encourage interfaces between the humanities and medical science and aims to facilitate and disseminate cross-disciplinary research. It also aims to offer opportunities for postgraduate study and research. HUMS aims for inclusion, and to collaborate with local and overseas centres, programmes and individuals with common interests.

HUMS, at the University of Malta was instituted following a joint request by the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery to the Senate of the University. Senate, at its meeting on 26 January 2012 upheld the request. The HUMS Programme was formally recognised by the Council of the University of Malta at its meeting on 9 February 2012. The first HUMS meeting was held at the library of the Faculty of Arts on Friday 27 January 2012 and was inaugurated by Professor Juanito Camilleri, Rector of the University of Malta. The event was introduced jointly by Professor Dominic Fenech, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Professor Godfrey LaFerla, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery. Both strongly supported and lauded this new initiative as it examines the many intersections between medicine, the human condition and the humanistic disciplines.

The meeting was organized by a small cross-discipline Steering Board made up of Joseph Cacciottolo, Ivan Callus, Victor Grech, Charles Savona Ventura and Clare Vassallo. The actual meeting was chaired by Professor Grech and Dr Vassallo. A total of nineteen papers were presented over the whole day's session.

Online information regarding the HUMS Programme at the University of Malta is available at: <http://www.um.edu.mt/programme/hums>