

10 years in the service of the profession

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Over 10 years ago two pharmacists got together and identified a gap in the professional development opportunities of pharmacists. They felt the need to address this gap and immediately teamed up with other pharmacists to help with the task at hand. A considerable amount of work followed, including a study of provision of continuing education systems in other countries and in other professions.

Pharmacists in Malta were surveyed to be able to identify their willingness to participate in such events and their educational practice needs. They were consulted over a variety of issues including timing of meetings and social issues such as planning meetings during periods when pharmacists who were parents were not in heavy demand at home. Meetings were never scheduled for Mondays as this tends to be a very hectic day for pharmacists practicing in community and neither were they scheduled on a Friday as this signifies the start of the weekend.

Based on feedback from the survey together with consultation with expert pharmacists and national health priorities,

a programme was formulated and mailed to all registered pharmacists in Malta. It was decided that the College would run as a pilot for a year to determine its viability, before being officially launched.

The following is an excerpt from the introduction to the first programme:

‘The strength of this initiative lies in our youth and enthusiasm for the profession. We feel that Maltese pharmacists have as much potential as their foreign counterparts but lack the proper infrastructure for professional development... These workshops provide the opportunity for all pharmacists to actively participate by pooling their acquired knowledge and experience.’

Journal of the Malta College of Pharmacy Practice

Issue 11 Summer 2006

ISSN 1811-9514

The Official Publication of
the Malta College of Pharmacy Practice
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The first session was held on the 8th March 1995, at the Department of Pharmacy, University of Malta. It addressed weight loss and food supplements and was delivered by Ms Claire Copperstone, a pharmacist and nutritionist.

The response far exceeded our expectations. We have since based our activities on the same principles that we declared initially i.e. our enthusiasm for the profession, the potential of pharmacists in Malta, active participation and pooling and building upon pharmacists' acquired knowledge and experience.

Having drawn up a statute, The Malta College of Pharmacy Practice was officially launched on the 31st July 1996. From its conception the College has chosen to follow this philosophy of Pharmaceutical Care defined as 'the responsible provision of drug therapy for the purpose of achieving definite outcomes that improve a patient's quality of life..... Pharmaceutical care is provided for the direct benefit of the patient and the pharmacist is responsible directly to the patient for the quality of that care'.¹

The Malta College of Pharmacy Practice is an autonomous academic institution that has been established to facilitate the participation of pharmacists in life-long learning, thereby contributing to their professional development. The ultimate aim is to provide pharmacists with the necessary tools to offer the best possible care and service to the patient.

In the summer of 1997 the need to keep in touch with pharmacists over the summer period was felt in addition to the weekly meetings in winter and autumn. Thus the first edition of the Chronic*ill was issued. At the time the format was more of a news letter. By 1999 it was transformed into a

scientific peer reviewed journal and later also obtained an ISSN number.

The title of the Journal went through a transition period last year and is now officially called The Journal of the Malta College of Pharmacy Practice. The Journal has a circulation of over 2000 and is distributed to all pharmacists and all medical doctors in Malta. The rationale behind distributing to medical doctors is to enhance professional collaboration and communication. The Journal is also mailed to specific institutions abroad.

The College is today an internationally recognised institution and willingly collaborates with other institutions both locally and internationally in the interest of the professional development of pharmacists in all areas of practice.

In July 2004 the College organised and hosted the 13th International Social Pharmacy workshop entitled "Social Pharmacy: Theoretical and Cultural Perspectives." The meeting, which was held for the first time in the Mediterranean region, welcomed 140 delegates from 30 countries making it one of the largest social pharmacy gatherings held to date. This was truly an accomplishment for the College, and it provided pharmacists practicing in Malta with the opportunity to network with international colleagues as well as to present their work at an international forum.

In July 2005 the College and the Journal featured prominently in an article published in the German pharmacy Journal *Deutsch Apotehker Zeitung* describing pharmacy in Malta as part of a series regarding pharmacy in the new EU member states.

Over the years the College has continued to grow and expand remaining mindful of the needs of its members. This year the College registered the highest number of members ever. It has also seen, with significant pride, a growing professional maturity, increasing assertiveness and professional pride amongst its members. Over time, the image of the College has changed and a more attractive logo was introduced.

Quality improvement is an ongoing process conducted by the council which is constituted entirely by voluntary members. Feedback and constructive criticism from members is encouraged and taken into consideration. Action has also been taken regarding issues raised by members related to professional practice. Members of the council sit on various committees representing the interest of the professional practice of pharmacy in Malta.

We would like to encourage members to take a more active role at the management and administrative level of the College in order to enable us to meet the ever increasing educational needs of pharmacists.

I would like to thank all members of the council past and present who have worked selflessly in the interest of the profession and to strengthen the College.

In the name of the Council I would also like to thank all those who have in any way supported the work of the College over these past 10 years and look forward to a challenging future together.

Reference

1. Hepler and Strand. Opportunities and responsibilities in pharmaceutical care. *American Journal of Hospital Pharmacy* 1990; 47:533-543.