

Dr Denis Soler MD MSc FRCGP FMCFD

1948 - 2016

Dr Mario R SAMMUT

The demise of Denis Soler on July 29, 2016 at the age of 68 years was mourned not just by his beloved family, friends and patients, but also by the family medicine community in Malta by whom he was regarded as a pioneer.

In 1988, Denis together with fellow family doctors Wilfred Galea and Ray Busuttill, were asked by the University of Malta's Faculty of Medicine and Surgery to devise a development plan for family medicine in Malta. Their report recommended the development of a University department of family medicine, the establishment of a programme of continuing medical education for family doctors, the development of a vocational training programme in family medicine and the setting up of a college of family doctors.

The Malta College of Family Doctors (MCFD) in fact was founded just two years later on April 4, 1990, with Denis as its first president. This was closely followed by the launch of a continuing professional development programme in September 1990, with such educational events for family doctors being regularly organised by the college to this day.

Following lobbying by the MCFD, a Department of Family Medicine was formally set up in April 2001 at the University of Malta's Medical School, with Denis as head of department. After initially focusing on the provision of an undergraduate teaching programme of lectures, tutorials and community placements, this was followed in 2007 by the launch of a postgraduate MSc in family medicine.

In 2000, the MCFD, under the continuing presidency of Denis, together with the Medical Association of Malta and the Director General (Health), approved a memo regarding the introduction of a course in vocational training in family medicine. This was the first step in the process leading to the launch of specialist training in family medicine in Malta during 2007, which training programme was afterwards accredited by the UK's Royal College of General Practitioners.

Meanwhile, during 2002, Denis led the college in discussions with the Ministry of Health regarding the elevation of Family Medicine to the status of a speciality. The Health Care Professions' Act, that that subsequently was



Dr Denis Soler, the first recipient of the Hon. FMCFD, May 10, 2013

passed through the Maltese Parliament in 2003, ensured such specialist status for Maltese family doctors.

Thus, within 20 years of the preparation, in 1988, of a plan for family medicine in Malta by Denis Soler, Wilfred Galea and Ray Busuttill, all four objectives of such plan were achieved, together with specialist status for family medicine.

For his contributions to the development of family medicine in Malta, Denis was made a fellow of the Royal College of General Practitioners (FRCGP) and was awarded the first honorary fellowship of the Malta College of Family Doctors (FMCFD) on May 10, 2013 (see accompanying photo).

As stated in his obituary, Denis Soler's life was short but lived well.

May the Lord grant him eternal rest.

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Reference

Sammut M.R., 2015. Silver service - 25 years of activities by the Malta College of Family Doctors (1990-2015). *Journal of the Malta College of Family Doctors*, 4(2), pp 6-17.