

The passing of two colleagues and pioneers

Prof. Pierre MALLIA

During July 2016 the College lost two important figures who advanced family medicine in Malta. Dr. Denis Soler served medical politics throughout his career. He was an avid GP and even co-started one of the biggest occupational health services organisations on the island. But he is mostly remembered as the President of the Malta College of Family Doctors and was very proud of saying that the first meeting was held in his own kitchen. I mentioned this a few years ago when, as President of the College for the second time, I felt it appropriate to award Denis with the first Honorary Fellowship of the MCFD. I asked him whether he was happy, given that whoever occupies the place of President knows the difficulties it carries and often the perception that no-one appreciates what you are doing. His reply came from the heart and I could see joy in his face. I am proud that as a College we appreciate the work of people during their lifetime. But Denis was also the founder-member of the first Department of Family Medicine in the Faculty of Medicine & Surgery at the University of Malta, with the help of then Dean, Prof. Mark Brincat and became the head of department until his retirement. I still remember an AGM we had which was hosted at St. Philip's Hospital when he described his plans and visions of a department within the Faculty of Medicine and of having a Master's Degree in Family Medicine. Although being involved in medical committees and politics brings with it a fair share of worries and conflicts which tax a person considerably, it is even for this we should all be grateful for having people like Denis who moved forward notwithstanding the silent suffering one feels; and it is for this that we will continue to recognise him for his invaluable work in family medicine locally.

We also mourn the passing away of Dr. John Howard, former International Chairman of the Royal College of General Practitioners who died peacefully in July following a year of illness. John encouraged the MCFD to pursue the post graduate training of doctors locally. He hosted Dr. Philip Sciortino at the Royal College in Princes' Gate for a teacher's course which subsequently led to a teacher's course for the MCFD in Malta several years later; this is where many of us got to know him. When I became President I got to know John very well and I was invited to attend an International Development Day at the RCGP. There I made a decision to move forward with MRCGP(INT). He said he would support me in any way. In fact I asked him whether, if I find sponsors for flights, he would host a delegation of five to seven people in London the following year. He did; not only for the following year but for several to come. His generosity went to sky-high levels. The AGM the following year approved that we would work towards MRCGP(INT) and more teachers courses. The rest is history. But without John's generosity I can honestly say we would not have made it so quickly. He was quick to move a memorandum of understanding and of appointing an International Advisor. Many of us have fond memories of John. The last time we saw him was last year during the Global Day at the RCGP. Joking and happy as usual, he concealed what he was going through. We only knew something was amiss when he politely refused to come as external examiner of the Dept. of Family Medicine due to health reasons. One of our External Advisors who visited our exam this year told us he did not speak about his illness and continued to come to work in his practice daily. We heard of his passing away on the last day of their visit.