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Guest editorial

## THE FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES – SEVEN YEARS ON

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I do not think that today the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) needs any introduction. It has now obtained its rightful place at the University of Malta. FHS is the second largest Faculty with over 1,300 students and has now been established for the past seven years. The Faculty has grown to include 12 Departments. The latest Department that was set up in 2015 was the Department of Mental Health, headed by Dr Paulann Grech.

FHS offers 13 programmes at undergraduate level and nine at Master level (taught). An M.Sc. degree mainly by research, introduced some five years ago, is proving to be very popular indeed and today there are 34 students registered for the degree which is offered both full-time and part-time. There are currently a total of 130 students registered with the faculty for a postgraduate degree, 15 of whom are registered for a Ph.D.

With regard to taught Master programmes, it should be stated that specialised Master degrees have been introduced over the past few years and new ones are being planned. The Department of Communication Therapy has trained one cohort of students for the Master in Audiology and is currently training the second, while this year, an M.Sc. in Clinical Speech and Language Sciences has been introduced. The Department of Podiatry will have the first cohort of students trained for the Master in Clinical Biomechanics graduating later on this year. The Department of Medical Physics has trained a cohort of Medical Physicists who, together with the new graduates of Radiotherapy, are manning the Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre.

All 12 departments are involved in the training of health care professionals who service the hospital. It is clear that a good working relationship needs to exist with the Department of Health, which consistently makes legitimate demands for new emerging specialisations, indeed for new professions. It is the responsibility of this Faculty to provide the training required when the need arises, if at all possible, of course. And this is no small feat!

An example of new professions that are emerging is the relatively new B.Sc. (Hons) programme in Elderly Care, which will be offered this coming October. Another emerging group of professionals that is very much required in Malta is that of Dietitians. To this end, a programme of studies at postgraduate diploma level has been designed by the Department of Food Studies and Environmental Health. The first cohort graduated in 2016. Currently, there are

another five students following this programme, most of whom had followed an undergraduate course in Applied Food and Nutritional Studies offered by the same department. These will graduate later this year. An interfaculty Master in Diabetes Care in collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery is also being planned. It is envisaged that this programme will be offered in October 2018. And finally, a new exciting programme which will be offered this coming academic year is an International Master programme in Community Psychiatric Nursing in collaboration with the University of Southern Indiana, U.S.A. This should provide the expertise required in this very important sphere, both locally and internationally.

Faculty status necessitated that we embark on a journey to consolidate our research efforts to attain higher standards. And this we are definitely doing! I am proud to say that some 60 papers, which include chapters in books, have been published by faculty members and postgraduate students in international peer-reviewed journals over the past two years. Last year, collaborative work with some of the best researchers on Genetics of Osteoporosis has resulted in research work conducted by Dr Melissa Formosa and myself being included in a paper in *Nature*, one of the most prestigious scientific journals.

It is also heartening to see a research project, co-ordinated by Dr Rosienne Farrugia from the Department of Applied Biomedical Science, in collaboration with the University of Cambridge and the Catholic University of Leuven, being funded to the tune of 1 million Euro in an EU Horizon 2020 Twinning Grant. This research project is entitled “Interdisciplinary Training in High Throughput, Bioinformatics and Model Systems: Moving towards Clinical Applications of Genomics (Train Malta)”. This is a 3-year project that will bring together scientists from the fields of genetics, molecular biology, information technology, computer science and bioinformatics from three partner universities.

As you can see, the Malta Journal of Health Sciences which was launched some four years ago is still going strong. It is both an online journal and a printed one. This current issue is the seventh one. Congratulations are in order for all the members of the Editorial Board, in particular the Editor-in-Chief, Dr Daniela Gatt, who works tirelessly to make this journal one of a very high standard. May this visible success spur us all on to higher achievements since

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the research carried out, across the range of health science disciplines represented in the Faculty, can generate a body of knowledge that goes towards providing ever better health care, which will ultimately benefit the Patient.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> April we had the presentation of the Dean's Awards to the best 10 students who have excelled in their studies by achieving an average of 80% and over, in either

of their middle two years. The 10 awardees are following different undergraduate programmes offered by the Faculty. I congratulate them all on their achievement and I sincerely hope that this award will encourage them to maintain their excellent performance throughout, and eventually to pursue postgraduate studies. On behalf of the Faculty, I would like to thank Technoline and Al-Nibras for sponsoring these awards.