

## **News from the Malta Association of Skin and wound Care: NURSING (MASC)**

The skin is the largest organ of the body but it still seems to be the Cinderella of health care systems the world over. Wounds have always been a major concern for nurses, doctors and other health care professionals – not to mention the patients and their relatives. There is an increasing drive to treat the patient holistically, and to aid patient recovery as quickly as possible to have him/her lead an independent life and restore normality.

On Friday 2nd December 2005, The Tissue Viability Unit based at St Luke's Hospital launched a Maltese Wound Care Foundation (MWCF). It was felt that a foundation was needed that would assist patients with chronic wounds by providing them not only with advice but also with practical support, in the form of special dressings, mattresses, and other equipment. To provide patients with chronic wounds with the best possible care, one needs trained and motivated health care professionals. The foundation aims to help in this regard by organizing special teaching sessions to keep health professionals up-to-date on wound care knowledge and skills. Another aim of the foundation is to support and organize much needed research in the area.

In June 2008, it was decided that the name should change and that a logo should be identified. During an educational activity, members of the Foundation chose the name - Maltese Association of Skin and Wound Care (MASC) - which would replace MWCF.

Tradition and a resistance to change are great forces to overcome and it is not easy to do away with practices based purely on "this is the way we have always done things". Great improvements are taking place in the field of wound care and we have to move on, in order to ensure that Maltese people with chronic wounds are receiving the best care possible. MASC aims to do this in a holistic manner by bringing together people from the various professions. Under the patronage of President Emeritus Dr. Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, MASC is a non-profit making,

non-governmental organization that depends financially on sponsorships, donations and fund-raising activities.

Although in its infancy, MASC has already organized several activities mainly in the form of conferences and educational activities. *"Skin and Wound Care Through the Ages"* 1-2 December 2005 was the first event that the Tissue Viability Unit organised in conjunction with the International Skin Care Nursing Group (ISNG) and with the help of the Directorate Nursing Services of Malta. An international conference on skin and wounds in Malta, this inaugural event was attended by over 450 delegates, from Malta as well as from overseas. Over 30 international speakers, together with 10 local speakers, delivered talks on all aspects of skin and wound care and presented their research findings and new knowledge. These speakers came from various faculties and professions. Similarly, delegates represented a cross-section of all health care professionals, including nurses, physicians, surgeons, pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and podiatrists. There was also a workshop organized for family doctors attended by 35 general practitioners. In June 2008, another seminar, aimed at the multidisciplinary approach to the care of the Diabetic Foot, was attended by nearly 500 nurses and paramedic personnel. It was an opportunity to evaluate the services provided for patients with diabetic foot ulcers in Malta and identify where we can improve that service.

Another very successful conference, organized by MASC in association with the tissue viability unit, was the assembly which ran alongside the European Tissue Repair Society annual meeting. Whilst ETRS focused on the science behind the wound healing process, the nurses' meeting concentrated on the evidence base for wound care, whilst also exploring issues related to skin health. This conference was another excellent example of how a multi-disciplinary team works together to improve care for patients. ETRS was very positive about having a nurse-focused meeting running alongside its own event and may well replicate this model at subsequent meetings.

In the short term, MASC is planning a national educational program for nurses and paramedic staff aimed for 2009-2010.

The program has already been outlined and it will now be presented to the management of all the hospitals and community services in Malta to see how it could best be implemented. MASC will also be working with ISNG to organize a formal course for nurses working in Dermatology and Skin Health. Additionally, very soon, MASC will be launching a web site that can be used by its members for accessing protocols, information and also presentations of past activities. This will also provide an opportunity to offer e-bulletins with information and articles for its members. In the long term MASC would like to formalize a University certificate in skin and wound care that could be linked to universities overseas. MASC would also like to participate and undertake research studies even on a multi-centered approach.

To date, the positive response to these events is encouraging. It is hoped that these conferences helped to increase the profile of skin and wound care in the Maltese Islands and to ultimately improve practice in these areas of healthcare. Professionals attend conferences to learn, network and share ideas and knowledge. It is an opportunity to stop and think about what we are doing when caring for our patients' skin and wounds. This area of care should not be taken for granted. MASC believes that part of the solution lies in the sharing of knowledge and not to work in isolation. Together, health professionals can greatly improve the quality of life of our patients.

MASC has over 200 members and is made up of the following Board Members:

Honorary President: MADV	Dr Joseph Pace – Consultant Dermatologist –President
Chairman:	Ms Corinne Ward – Tissue Viability Nurse
Vice-Chairman:	Dr Eileen Borg - Dermatologist
Secretary:	Dr Susan Aquilina -Dermatologist
Treasurer:	Ms Berniece Spiteri -Nurse
Members:	Ms Doreen Barbara -Nurse Mr Leonard Schembri -Nurse
Honorary Members:	Dr Lawrence Scerri –Consultant Dermatologist Dr Dino Vella Briffa – Consultant Dermatologist Dr Michael Boffa – Consultant Dermatologist Mr Omar Schembri - Podologist Mr Denis Gatt –Vascular Surgeon Mr Kevin Cassar –Vascular Surgeon Dr Christopher Barbara - Microbiologist