

## **Integrating, Religion/Spirituality into clinical practise; focus on health care professionals'**

**The Conference is being held at Mater Dei Hospital between Thursday 22 May and Saturday 24 May 2014**

*(Marie Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta)*

It is with pleasure that I receive you here today. Firstly, to our foreign guests, I give you a warm welcome to our beautiful island. I do hope that you will be allowed at least some time away from your work at the conference to be able to visit some of the treasures of our country.

The most notable among Maltese treasures are definitely our churches, which are truly majestic and filled with renowned works of art. St. John's Co-Cathedral which is very near to here is a gem of Baroque art and architecture built as the conventual church for the Knights of St John and houses works of high artistic value.

Interestingly, here are 365 churches in Malta, maybe one for every day. But the true value of the churches is not their beauty or the riches they possess, but the fact that they offer a place of prayer, a place of refuge in time of need and a solace of being near to God or a higher being that each person believes in.

You will be discussing and exchanging your expertise and research results on a very important lacuna that I believe has been ignored before now. The relationship between religion/spirituality and health is highly relevant in addressing patients' needs holistically.

The human being is NOT composed solely of the physical body, but has emotions, feelings, social perspectives to life, and of course the spiritual dimension.

The medical model of care tends to focus on the physical aspect of care, investigations and treatment and cure. However, patients' religion, spirituality and personal beliefs and culture need to be incorporated in the assessment of patients' needs and problems in order to address patients' needs holistically.

I believe it is important to address people's needs holistically, to be able to answer to questions asked even at a spiritual level. Questions like 'why me?' 'God has forgotten me' 'God is punishing me'. All these statement are exceptionally difficult to answer, so all healthcare professionals need training in skills and competences in addressing such difficult aspects of care. Education needs to embrace such concepts of 'spiritual care' in collaboration with the hospital chaplains and the members of the multidisciplinary team.

The spiritual care given alongside physical and emotional care is indeed what makes the health care profession a truly caring profession, where it is a vocation as opposed to a solely a career. Further research is needed on the Maltese patients and their families, immigrants who tend to have different religions, in order to explore further the holistic dimension of care.

It is in times of illness, and crisis, individuals tend to turn to God/higher power for help and empowerment in order to cope in life. And it is the health care professional who is the first point of contact with individuals at this time. That is how important you are to people going through these difficult times.

I augur that you have a successful conference. May your work here bring hope to all the people under your care, so that they too may live dignified lives even when they are going through so much pain and suffering.