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in
PAEDIATRIC
CARDIOLOGY

Images Paediatr Cardiol. 1999 Jan-Mar; 1(1): 1–2.

PMCID: PMC3232474

A new venture from an old medical school

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Malta has a long and distinguished history related to medicine. Malta's medical school is one of the oldest in the world, and traces its formal establishment to the appointment of Fra Dr Giuseppe Zammit, a priest physician and a Chaplain of the Hospitaller and Military Order of St. John , in 1676, as 'lettore' in Anatomy and Surgery at the Order's Sacra Infermeria in Valletta.

There is evidence, as yet unpublished, that for decades before Zammit's appointment, the Sacra Infermeria, the Order's hospital, attracted to its wards a substantial number of foreign undergraduate and postgraduate students who used to come to Malta to undergo training, especially in surgery. A regular flow of patients from neighbouring Mediterranean countries also used to seek succour at the infirmary, particularly in cases of trauma and such ocular conditions as cataracts. The coming of the English in 1800 resulted in our University being run along English academic lines. Teaching in our medical school too became 'anglicised'. Early on this century our medical degrees became recognised by the General Medical Council of Great Britain. Our medical graduates are to be found scattered all over the world occupying chairs and other important appointments in many prestigious institutions. Zammit laid down sound foundations and the Medical School continues to flourish.



University of Malta Coat of arms

There have been a number of local medical journals, one of the first was the St. Luke's Hospital Gazette which ceased publication in 1978. The Maltese Medical Journal and the Journal of the Malta College of Family Doctors are still published regularly.



The Sacra Infermeria

The World Wide Web offers a unique opportunity for the launch of an international journal from Malta. The advantages of on-line publication are numerous. The most significant advantage is the absence of publishing costs for images, irrespective of the number of images per journal issue. Similarly, there is no difference in publishing costs of black and white versus colour images. This lack of constraint with regards to images is especially useful in pediatric cardiology where imaging is all-important. The publishing industry is experiencing a paradigm shift, as publishing on the Internet becomes increasingly common for many established journals. Some journals, such as the BMJ, duplicate published material in print and on-line. Others, such as Pediatrics, publish partly in print and partly on-line. Yet others, such as this journal, publish exclusively on-line. It is anticipated that hyperspace will become the preferred means of accessing published material in future.

I wish this venture all the success it deserves. A word of praise and encouragement to Victor Grech who all along was the 'vis a tergo' is surely not amiss.

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