

Cultural Mediation

Overcoming language problems within the Maltese health care system

Cultural mediators were recruited at Mater Dei Hospital in February this year to help overcome cultural and linguistic barriers in health care. The management recognised the need for the service of cultural mediators within the hospital following the result of a needs assessment study carried out by the Migrant Health Unit amongst health professionals in twelve units/wards at Mater Dei Hospital with the objectives to:

- Identify the needs of service providers in their health care provision to migrants
- To develop a service with regard to these needs
- To assess the possibility for incorporating a cultural mediation service at Mater Dei Hospital

The need for the study was perceived to be important by the Migrant Health Unit following the commencement of the provision of cultural mediators in Floriana Health Centre (Department of Primary Health), in October 2009. The findings that emerged from the needs assessment clearly showed that seventy-three percent (73%) of health professionals could not obtain relevant information from migrants, forty-nine percent (49%) did not understand the needs of patients and seventy percent (70%) of migrants were not able to communicate well enough with health professionals to describe their symptoms, past medical history, etc. The most common difficulties were: reaching a diagnosis, compliance to treatment, continuity of care and giving health information.

MARIKA PODDA CONNOR
Migrant Health Unit Coordinator,
Department of Primary Health, Malta

Thirty-nine percent (39%) had daily contact with migrant patients and in most cases untrained interpreters were being utilized to facilitate communication. It is strongly recommended not to make use of untrained interpreters in health care (especially children) due to issues of confidentiality and the way that information may be misinterpreted due to lack of knowledge in medical terminology and communication skills.

On completion, the needs assessment study presented to the CEO of Mater Dei Hospital, the acting Superintendent, the Director for Nurses and the Nursing and Midwifery Managers by the Migrant Health Coordinator (Department of Primary Health) after which, a working group formed. Other personnel from the Human Resource Department, the Purchasing Department and the Materials Management and Logistics were also involved in the working group. The results of this in-service study led to the recruitment of four (4) cultural mediators at the Mater Dei Hospital, the main acute hospital in Malta.

Migrants attending Primary, Secondary and tertiary Health Care today have better access to these services. Equality of access cannot be guaranteed without a common understanding between the professional and the client. Moreover, it is often frightening and confusing for both the client and the professional not to be able to communicate over health care decisions, diagnosis and compliance to treatment. Working with cultural mediators will be the next challenge for health professionals as they will soon realize that a positive outcome for the migrant patient highly depends on the full collaboration of the two parties.

Cultural Brokers

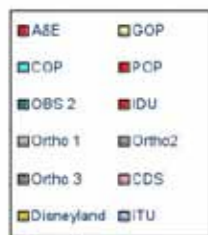
Creating a space for dialogue

Cultural mediators, also known as cultural brokers, do not only facilitate clinical encounters but interpret how the client experiences his illness and what it means to him and his family. They explain the world of the health professional to the patient and the world of the patient to the health professional. Most cultural mediators are migrants from the same cultural backgrounds as their clients. As a consequence they understand very well the needs of their clients and the obstacles they have to overcome.

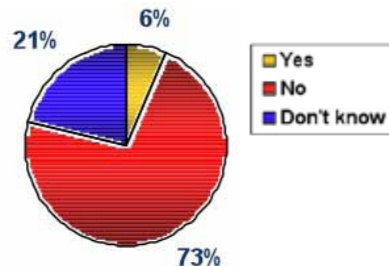
In Malta this training has been developed and delivered by the Migrant Health Unit Coordinator periodically. The eight (8) training sessions cover a range of topics which are relevant to the complex role of the cultural mediator within a clinical setting. To date forty (40) cultural mediators from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast and other West African countries have been awarded the certificate for completing the programme.

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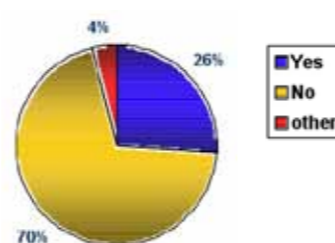
1. Identified areas of respondents



2. Ability to obtain relevant information from migrant patients



3. Ability of migrants to communicate



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Soul-searching

The crisis in the Southern Mediterranean has once more stolen the limelight

Malta's political role in Europe and the Mediterranean was once more determinant when it was instrumental for the evacuation of thousands of workers, both Maltese and foreign, receiving acclaims the world over. In addition 1535 migrants fleeing Libyan shores through irregular channels came to Malta compared to the less than 50 of last year. Other events were unfolding in Malta – including preparations for the launch of the European Asylum Support Office which took place on the 19th June.

Its opening could not have been more timely. In situations of particular pressure EASO is mandated to deploy Asylum Support Teams to help countries deal with such eventualities with the first missions being sent to assisting Greece build up its asylum capacity.

It was in this context that the Malta NCP prepared for its first twinning meeting, which was held on April 14th. The main purpose and aim of the Twinning Meeting was to discuss the developments in migration and asylum, particularly the main developments and issues in Mediterranean Member States. Italy, Cyprus and Greek NCP's participated and together with Maltese experts and academics contributed to the round table discussion.

The Italian NCP pointed out that although the number of migrants in Italy would rise from 5 million to 12.3 million by 2050, it was important to compare the benefits of immigration to its costs and indicated that in their case the benefits amounted to €10.8 billion compared to a cost of €9.9 billion.

Just as the European Union was facing the hard task of soul searching its pragmatic vocation, the European Migration Network embarked on an external evaluation exercise of the network. Questionnaires and face-to-face interviews with a large number of National Contact Points were conducted, including with Malta. The results showed the efficacy and relevance of the ad hoc query liaison which highlighted the intensity of networking among the EMN member states as well as the positive influence on policymakers and EU institutions.

This has already been achieved through the Unaccompanied Minors Action Plan, following an EMN study. Although the EMN's corporate image could improve in quantitative terms of exposure yet this does not reflect the quality of its content – mainly that of the studies and research with which it feeds the policy makers. Through its work the EMN has the advantage of producing comparable data by all Member States which is quite unique in European organisations.



A change in the Maltese asylum history

MARIO FRIGGIERI
Commissioner for Refugees

The implementation of the ERF Project 2009-2011

Whereas in the previous years asylum seekers were given a translated copy of the first registration form and were expected to fill it in themselves, this Office is now offering individual assistance to each and every asylum seeker. To this effect interpreters and personnel from the Office of the Refugee Commissioner are assisting asylum seekers in filling in this registration form by which they register their desire to apply for international protection. Personnel from this Office, with the help of fully trained interpreters are also giving information sessions to potential asylum seekers as soon as they enter Malta, informing them of their rights and obligations if they desire to apply for asylum.

The Office of the Refugee Commissioner's main responsibility is to receive process and determine applications for asylum, as stipulated by the Refugees Act.

Everyone has the right to seek asylum. An asylum seeker is a person who has left his country because of particular problems and has sought asylum in another country but who is still awaiting for a decision on his application for asylum. This does not mean that everyone has an absolute right to be granted asylum. It is the Office of the Refugee Commissioner who will recommend, after a rigorous examination, whether an asylum seeker should be granted some form of international protection.

Obviously this examination procedure is a very sensitive task and requires both legal and technical expertise. The Office of the Refugee Commissioner believes that both the interviewer and the asylum seeker have to be prepared for this very important process. In this regard, the Office of the Refugee Commissioner has utilized EU funding to fulfill this two fold mission.

This Office has also prepared an informative audio visual production as well as notepads containing information about the asylum procedure in Malta and which is further presented to all asylum seekers as soon as they register their desire to apply for international protection. The audio-visual presentation and the information booklet is presently available in eleven languages.

Through this project, the Office of the Refugee Commissioner was also able to

The implementation of the ERF Project 2009-2011 entitled "Post Application client preparation and asylum determination interviewing centre for asylum seekers" marked a change in the Maltese asylum history. This is because through this project, there has been a drastic change in how asylum seekers register their desire to apply for international protection in Malta.



provide training to interpreters as well as asylum determination officers.

Another project which aimed to strengthen the existing asylum infrastructure was the Emergency Measures Project (ERF August 2009- January 2010). Through this project the Office of the Refugee Commissioner employed a number of asylum determination officers to examine the pending asylum applications, hence enabling this Office to fulfil its fundamental objective of ensuring a fair and an efficient asylum procedure within the first six months of the immigrants' arrival in Malta. Through this project the Office of the Refugee Commissioner has also extended the current premises by investing in mobile offices. With the use of the new office space, this Office

now has 12 properly equipped interviewing rooms in the different centres.

The GDISC Pilot Project on Particular Pressures in Malta (Jan 2009- December 2009), funded by the ERF Community Actions 2008 depicted an example of direct practical cooperation between Immigration services of the GDISC network. Throughout 2009 the Office of the Refugee Commissioner was offered the possibility of linguistic analysis sponsored by the Dutch and the UK authorities.

Two Dutch experts also delivered a series of workshops which focused on both theoretical and practical aspects in the field of documentation analysis and civil status documents. ●

This year marks two important anniversaries, the 10th Anniversary of the establishment of the Office of the Refugee Commissioner in Malta and the 60th Anniversary of the Geneva Convention which forms the backbone of international humanitarian law.

The Office of the Refugee Commissioner organised a public Conference and a Training Seminar to commemorate World Refugee Day co-funded by the European Refugee Fund. The conference was entitled "The Asylum procedure...and then ...what?" The main stakeholders as well as the public in general were informed of the several key milestones that have been achieved throughout the last years.

The Office of the Refugee Commissioner also launched a three day training seminar for the asylum determination officers entitled "The Law of Refugee Status" led by Professor James C. Hathaway, an eminent legal scholar in the field of international refugee law. Professor James C. Hathaway also gave a public lecture entitled "Saving International Refugee Law", aimed to present a number of challenging perspectives.

Migration has become one of the main topics on the European Union's agenda and thoroughly studied by researchers and policy makers alike. Over the past decade, the European Union has seen many demographic changes occurring due to migration.

Mainstreaming migration statistics

ETIENNE CARUANA Director, Social Statistics and Information Society National Statistics Office

According to figures published by Eurostat last year, total net migration in the EU last year totalled 0.9 million, exceeding natural increase by 0.4 million, thus proving migration to be the main contributor to population increase.

Malta is no exception. Despite its size, with a total population of less than half a million inhabitants and a relatively small economy, it still experienced its fair share of migrant movements. Today, non-Maltese residents comprise 4 per cent of the total population.

Over the past years, a proportionately large number of immigrants, with diverse socio-economic backgrounds, reached Malta's shores. A significant number of immigrants sought work or education, while others came for family reasons. Malta's geographical position also makes it prone to irregular immigration. Moreover, the past three years saw a substantial number of irregular migrants reaching the Maltese Islands seeking international protection hoping for a better life in Europe.

On the other hand, there have been an increasing number of Maltese residents emigrating abroad, mainly for work or educational purposes. Many of these migrants have particular socio-economic

and demographic characteristics, which often affect specific population cohorts, thus contributing to population change.

Undoubtedly, migration trends are today posing major challenges to the European Union, and effective policy in this regard should be based on relevant and timely statistics, mandated by the European Regulation (EC No. 862/2007) on migration statistics, which came into force in 2007.

With this Regulation, Eurostat broadened the former data collection exercise on migrants to a more exhaustive set of statistics. It covers the main areas of migration statistics, which include provision of statistics on international protection, statistics on residence permits, statistics on irregular entry and forced returns, as well as statistics on regular migratory flows.

This regulation also ensures harmonisation with respect to the methodologies used in Member States, thus increasing comparability at a European level. All countries are required to respect pre-stipulated deadlines thus guaranteeing the provision of timely statistics indispensable for decision-making purposes. It also provides for a charter of quality empowering Eurostat to coordinate and oversee the work done by the Member States.

Despite the increased variety of harmonised statistics that are now available, the demand for more information prevails. Users argue that policy-making requires more information rather than just counts and magnitudes of migratory flows. There is a need for statistical offices to collect detailed information on migrants, such as education, labour status and health. It is also important that migrant populations are adequately represented in national social surveys like the European Survey on Income and Living Conditions and the Labour Force Survey.

These issues were discussed in detail during the last meeting for Directors General of EU National Statistical Institutes (DGINS), held in Malta last year. Member States were encouraged to conduct a thorough analysis of the existing sources of statistics in order to verify whether they could be 'modified' to cater for these new statistical needs. Such initiatives naturally depend on strong cooperation between national statistical institutes, ministries and other interested parties.

Indeed, mainstreaming of migration statistics will be high on the agenda of statistical institutes over the next decade, as population counts become less dependent on natural changes and more on migration. ●