18th March 2020

Guidance for New Doctors and the Profession during the COVID-19 situation

The Medical Council Malta (MCM) recognizes the incredible effort that the profession is enduring during the current COVID-19 pandemic. This calls for the profession to respect the oath taken on being conferred their degree and for much reflection with regard to patient safety and their own personal safety.

The MCM issued guidance on the need to be flexible in health service provision and the need for telephone and virtual consultations during this period. Online prescribing following all safety principles has also been allowed temporarily. However, the Council has felt the need to communicate further and support the profession.

The need for increased professional workforce

Doctors are at the frontline of service provision and some will unfortunately become infected. All measures to keep safe must be taken. Authorities should provide all the necessary equipment and tools to keep both patients and doctors safe. As doctors fall ill there will be the need for doctors to move out of their routine area of practice to fill in gaps in the service.

The Council reminds doctors of basic ethical principles which, when one is over worked and overzealous, may become blurred.

- Respect one another and work in teams. All other health care professionals are under the same stresses. We need to take care of each other.
- Know your limitations. It is when one does not recognise this, that mistakes will happen. Patients cannot be put at risk.
- Let others know when you are out of your depth.
- Ask for help.
- Minimise the risk of transmission for the patient and for yourself.

As the infectivity rate increases there may be difficult decisions to take. The Council is aware of this and guides all to keep proper documentation. At all times shared decision making is preferable.
Trainee Medical Doctors

The MCM has noted the request by the Department of Health for the need to increase the workforce through the engagement of Trainee Medical Doctors. All these trainees have passed their final year written examinations. They will be granted a time limited Temporary Registration. All registered professionals should recognize that these trainee doctors are being introduced to the profession during challenging times. We must all do our best to provide supervision and train these young professionals.

These Trainee Medical Doctors are reminded that they must follow the Hippocratic Oath and be guided by ethical principles at all times.

Personal Health

Sick doctors cannot be heroes. Knowing one’s limitations calls for knowing that when you feel symptoms, you must heed them and become a patient. Doctors often find this difficult. The MCM calls for doctors to keep safe for their own sake, their family’s sake and for their patients.

Tiredness leads to patient safety issues as well as a decrease in awareness of barrier methods for transmission control. Do take your rest and eat well. Communicate your needs and work as a team.

Mental health in these circumstances will be affected. Our resilience helps us. However, be aware that resilience does not come easy for all. Be ready to notice colleagues who are struggling - empathize and try to help. A simple acknowledgment and kind word can work miracles. Mental health support can always be found at the workplace, reach out for it if need be.

Some of us may suffer from their own health issues. Please declare your needs and be careful. We need to respect these doctors who often find it difficult not to be able to give their all in these circumstances.

May we all continue to strive to be of service. Malta needs us all.