



PRESS RELEASE

Study on melanoma to commence in Gozo

Addressing a press conference, Minister for Gozo Giovanna Debono said that later on this year a study on melanoma is to commence in Gozo. This is the first study of its type worldwide, since this is the first time a whole population, aged 16 and over, will be studied for melanoma incidence.

The Maltese Association of Dermatology and Venereology together with the University of Siena, University of Melbourne and the Ministry for Gozo will be carrying out an intensive exercise as from September 2004. In this three-year project, the population of the island of Gozo (aged sixteen years and over), will be screened for early melanoma cases. Similar exercises were carried out in Italy and Australia but were never spread over a whole population.

Melanoma is a skin cancer that will invariably cause death if it is deep within the skin or has spread to other parts of the body. Radiotherapy and anticancer drugs are not usually useful in late cases. It is thus vital to use any proven method that increases the diagnostic rate of early melanoma. Computer aided diagnosis is proposed to achieve this and increase substantially the diagnostic accuracy (90%+).

In Gozo, diagnosis through a computerised system, perfected by the University of Siena, will be used. This technological system uses imaging and completely non-invasive techniques to scan lesions and moles that are then compared electronically with an extensive databank of similar moles. This is a very efficient way to screen the skin and obtain results in a short time, indicating whether the spot in question is absolutely benign or whether it is best removed and examined in the laboratory.

Italian experts will be back in Gozo later on this year to commence the first phase of this intensive project, which is being done in consultation with Maltese and Australian experts.

The Ministry for Gozo is collaborating together with the remaining parties to conduct this project, which is a very important one for the health service in Gozo and for science in general. All logistical support throughout the study

is being co-ordinated by the Ministry for Gozo, through the Gozo General Hospital, where medical and nursing staff are being involved.

Whilst wishing success in the sense that the project's results will continue to assist the medical service, Minister Debono thanked all parties for choosing the island of Gozo where such an important and intensive project will be held. The Minister stated that as soon as she was approached with proposals for this project she immediately gave the green light. Other than the project's significance for science, it is yet another quality service that will be provided by the Ministry for Gozo, through the Gozo General Hospital, to its most esteemed clients.

The Minister for Gozo stressed the importance the health sector is given by the administration in Gozo. The Minister said that it is in fact one of the highest priorities of the Ministry for Gozo. Throughout these last years, the Ministry has introduced new services at the hospital as well as improved the existing facilities whilst adding on new ones. The ultimate aim is for patients in Gozo to receive the best possible treatment in Gozo itself. The Minister referred to the commencement of this screening programme as a completely new service for the Maltese Islands and said that it is certainly another step ahead to continue improving the quality of health care offered on Gozo.

The Minister invited all Gozitans aged 16+ to collaborate so that this project, which is for the benefit of the whole community, will be successful. Minister Debono stressed the fact that we have to change the mentality that going for a medical test envisaged problems. On the contrary, she said, early tests can offer solutions to potentially bigger problems.

Dr Joseph I Pace, President of the Maltese Association of Dermatology and Venereology; Professor Lucio Andreassi and Professor Marco Burrone from the University of Siena addressed the press conference and explained, from the technical aspect, the benefits reaped from such a project. Dr Anthony Livori, Medical Superintendent at the Gozo General Hospital was also present.

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