

Professionals unite in Covid-19 crisis

Over 10 thousand frontline professionals and close to the same amount of other professionals are facing challenges to keep offering a professional service to the general public despite the measures imposed to put the health of the citizens first. The Malta Federation of Professional Associations (MFPA) which represents 17 professional associations with almost 10,000 members, urges all professionals to continue respecting their ethical responsibilities in trying as much as possible to maintain continuity of service towards their clients and patients in these difficult times. MFPA urges professionals to remember the core values of their profession and to serve the public without any discrimination and with full commitment to the profession they form part of. **However, for this to happen, MFPA is also appealing to the relevant authorities to provide all personal protective equipment to healthcare professionals and others who are constantly exposed to a higher risk of being infected with the Covid-19 virus.**

The current crisis which the whole world is living in brought along sudden changes which very few people were prepared for. We all had to find new ways of carrying out daily chores, new means of working by adopting teleworking facilities and drastically limiting our social contact in respect to social distancing directives. As with any other industry, professionals were also hit by this crisis and they had to find new ways to continue being of service to their clients and provide the services required. Some healthcare workers, who are in the forefront of this crisis, had to abandon their families temporarily, to be able to continue being of service to the most vulnerable.

The Presidents of the Member Organisations of the MFPA are meeting regularly to discuss the different issues that are being faced by their members. The aim of these meetings is to provide inter-professional support and share good practices that can support the continuity of services in a safe manner.

Some professionals have stopped their practice altogether leading to a great economic loss for them and their families. **These professionals are not eligible to any support through the packages announced by government so far.** Others are working longer hours than ever before at the detriment of their health, their quality of life and that of their families. Some of these professionals are not even financially compensated for this due to their professional grade.

Several professionals, such as veterinarians, engineers and radiographers are now trying to work in different teams to reduce the risk that all of them get sick at the same time. Due to lack of resources and specific guidelines provided by authorities, some organizations, for instance the Dental Association of Malta, Malta Veterinary Association and Chamber of Pharmacists took the initiative to collate a series of guidelines to ensure safe practice as much

as possible. The Chamber of Psychologists is providing ongoing training on conducting online therapy. The Association of Speech-Language Pathologists also encouraged its members to carry out telepractice and provided information. The Malta Association of Physiotherapists is striving to support the vulnerable groups within its workforce such as assuring that those who are pregnant or suffer from chronic conditions assist their clients via remote consultations, supporting the private physiotherapy sector so that they can assist healthy individuals within the community and mediating to those running private clinics to tap into COVID-19 Wage Supplement.

Certain public and private health services in community and out-patients clinics, such as podiatry, occupational therapy and speech-language therapy have been suspended with the exception of urgent cases. Members of the Malta Association of the Counselling Profession and the Malta Association of Social Workers are also encouraging and supporting their members to continue intervening by exploring and using different mediums to keep in contact with vulnerable people. Associations and members are also involved in the creation of Helplines and taking part in these to support the community through providing counselling, support and assistance as requested.

The Malta Chamber of Pharmacists is in constant contact with government authorities to ensure timely and extended pharmaceutical services to patients whilst safeguarding pharmacists who are frontliners in the community during this emergency. The Chamber of Engineers has also addressed the situation with its members to take care of following the national directives and has also highlighted the key role of engineers and encouraged their professional activity as far as possible for the common good.

MFPA urges the government to meet professional organisations separately to understand their respective problems. Finally, all member organisations of MFPA appeal to the general public to follow rigorously the constant advice provided by the health authorities and healthcare professionals. We call on respect and common sense to ensure that the healthcare system does not suffer a sudden surge in patients' needs. We also appeal to the competent government authorities to place Public Health first and foremost, before economic matters, and to take heed to the recommendations of professionals and their associations. We also take the opportunity to thank once again all healthcare workers who are in the forefront as well as the Superintendent of Public Health and the Minister of Health for their sterling service.