

News

Year plan to Mount Carmel Hospital



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The process for building a hospital for Acute Psychiatry has started. The vast improvement in psychiatric treatment both medical and non-medical of the last decades has changed the service of care drastically.

Prolonged admissions in institutions are no longer recommended. The treatment recommended now is that admissions during the acute state of severe illness are as short as possible. These admissions will be in parallel with support in the community during the non-acute stages of illness.

The development of the new acute hospital is within this philosophical framework. The location chosen for this hospital is in the Mater Dei Hospital campus. There are several reasons why this area was chosen. The fact that people with mental illness experience a higher incidence of physical problems than the general population is well documented. Closer proximity to general medical and surgical services will make for more timely interventions and reduce the risk of chronicity which affects length of stay.

Sharing of clinical and non-clinical services between



Mater Dei Hospital and the Acute Psychiatric Hospital will make the services more economically feasible. This location will also reduce the stigma associated with psychiatric illness and hospital admissions. This stigma is one of the main reasons why persons with mental illness do not seek help, with disastrous consequences.

The medical brief for this hospital is in the process of being finalised and a Project Monitoring Board – led by the Health Minister – has been set up to lead this ambitious project that will revolutionize the delivery of psychiatric care in Malta. Discussions on this medical brief with interested stakeholders will commence shortly.

The shortage of nurses European wide is also reflected in Malta with mental health not being spared. The Ministry of Health together with the union of nurses has an ongoing campaign to recruit nurses in the country. Locally, a specialised degree in mental health is offered at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The improved physical environment at Mount Carmel as well as the ongoing reorganization of services – including new planned services in the community – is expected to have a positive effect on the recruitment of nurses in this sector. We are also in discussions with MUMN – the nurses' union – to not only increase staff, but also to utilize existing staff more efficiently in the interests of patient safety

The Commissioner for Mental Health said in his annual report that certain wards are in dire need of refurbishment. What are you doing about this?

There is a commitment from the government to address this issue - the financial backing has been obtained and a strategic plan has been agreed on. In a few weeks' time, we will see the result of the first step of this project with the opening of a newly refurbished medical/psychiatric ward which has been upgraded to international clinical standards – Male Ward 2. The refurbishment of this Ward alone cost €1 million. Money well spent in my opinion.

Dr Vicky Sultana, the director for nursing services, has recently been appointed at Mount Carmel Hospital. What are her responsibilities?

This is a new role for Mental Health and continues to show the high level of commitment that the government has to this sector. The new nursing director has been appointed to support and lead the present nursing administration that has been working hard for many years with dedication and

commitment. Sultana has already proved herself at Mater Dei where she was instrumental in bringing about change and service improvements in this hospital. She now takes her vast experience in nursing management to Mount Carmel.

Mount Carmel also has a new chief executive officer Stephen Sultana. Was putting someone in the top post with no knowledge in mental health the right thing to do?

As he has already shown, the new CEO has all the necessary skills and experience to lead the sector of mental health with the support of clinical experts in the field. Sultana is proving to be a dedicated and energetic leader with great managerial skills. I wish him and his team well and will continue to support him as necessary.

2020, there will be more mental health issues than heart and diabetes problems. What is the government doing to prevent this?

We are conscious that mental health problems are on the increase. In fact, we have embarked on a number of projects to start addressing this. For instance, we have consolidated and expanded the post-natal mental health service. This is now being extended to screen infants and young children for the first signs of mental health problems since evidence now shows that very early intervention can avoid long-term problems later in life. We are also working on the National Health Strategy for 2020 - 2030 (the current one runs until 2020) which will include a comprehensive mental health plan.

Over the past weeks, issues of lack of security and shortage of staff at Mount Carmel Hospital have resurfaced. Are these claims true? How is the Ministry for Health encouraging nurses to specialise in psychiatric care?

