

**Opening Speech, at the 4th Horatio Festival of Psychiatric
Nursing: 'Working in Partnership'
Thursday 11 May 2017**

**It is my pleasure to open the 4th Horatio Festival of
Psychiatric Nursing, entitled "Working in Partnership".**

**Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the
organisers, since this is the third time that this event is
being held in our islands.**

I have fond memories of your previous festivals held in Malta, and I must commend the Malta Association of Psychiatric Nurses, who have co-hosted and facilitated the event everytime.

Furthermore, I am informed that the Horatio team, under the leadership of its President, Mr Martin Ward, has been collaborating alongside other major mental health groups in Europe, facilitated by the World Health Organisation.

I am also informed that through the combined efforts of the Horatio team and other major mental health groups, you have developed common strategies, which shall, I am sure, be of global benefit.

I am pleased to note that you are prioritising a powerful trans-disciplinary approach, by combining diverse disciplines.

Furthermore, many of the practitioners within these disciplines are finding new ways to link up with the field of nursing.

In some ways, this is happening for the very first time, and I commend you on reaching this milestone.

I would like to point out that by coming together, you are building a stronger network of solidarity and support.

I am informed that one of the outcomes of this network shall be a consensus document, which will be launched by the World Health Organisation at today's festival.

I truly would like to commend this approach, as in a world that is becoming increasingly so inter-connected, working in synergy, is so important.

In fact, working in synergy has been very central to my Presidency, and I would like to share, with you, a practical way that such synergy is being achieved in the sector of mental health.

The President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, in collaboration with the Mental Health Commissioner of Malta, began by facilitating a mental health platform, whereby all mental health NGOS have come together to share good practice and strategies for the future.

Moreover, with the active involvement of service users and mental health NGOs, my Foundation has held a series of meetings, to further explore ways of improving the wellbeing of people experiencing problems of mental health.

During the course of these meetings, I visited three of the four Mental Health Community Centres in Malta, in order to listen to service users and to engage with their perspectives on the challenges which impact their daily lives.

Furthermore, my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, met with different stakeholders, organisations and NGOs, and, following these collaborations, will, in the near future, produce a number of tangible policy recommendations that can be used, hopefully, as building blocks to strengthen the existing national mental health policy.

Working as an interconnected team, across the whole of society, your work provides essential life-improving, and sometimes, even life-saving, services.

Working together, we can build stronger communities, while also sending a powerful message of unity and solidarity.

Let us also never forget the need for active participation, within these circles of collaboration, of the individuals and their families, who are themselves experiencing issues of mental health.

Service-users should be encouraged to be part of respectful processes of dialogue and development.

The involvement of service-users around a dialogue table is a very tangible way of empowering people experiencing problems of mental health.

Let me share with you a first-hand experience of the effect of such empowerment.

Quite a number of years ago, I remember encountering a middle-aged gentleman, who I had known for a long time in the community.

Some years later, to my disappointment, I learned that he was receiving care at Mount Carmel Mental Hospital.

He was a patient there for many years. However, I had never known that, apart from having mental health problems, he was also a talented artist.

Fortunately, his talents had been recognised by an NGO, who facilitated for him an exhibition of his paintings.

This NGO happened to invite me to open this exhibition. To my great surprise, I found out that the artist was this gentleman, whom I had known for so many years.

After my conversations with him, and with the cooperation of the Mount Carmel Hospital staff, I invited this gentleman to continue to paint in a private garden at San Anton Palace. Soon he became the artist-in-residence at San Anton Palace.

He was befriended by the team of the President's Foundation, and after a year of visiting us to paint, he felt empowered enough to leave the hospital.

Today, he enjoys semi-independent living at a hostel.

To everyone's great joy, we recently launched an exhibition of his artworks at San Anton Palace, to which day-centre service-users were invited.

Moreover, a selection of his works has been incorporated in the Richmond Foundation's mental health first aid publication.

This is an effective example of just how much can be achieved by involving service-users and their unique contributions, while also bringing individuals and communities together.

We must continue working to promote and to prioritise the essential dignity of individuals experiencing problems of mental health.

We must, therefore, ensure that the voices of all people touched by the effects of mental illness are valued.

We must break the stigma and silence which continues to surround issues of mental health.

I believe that it is crucial for all of us to be given equal opportunities to share our narratives and experiences, whoever we might be.

This collaborative approach is a stimulating source of strength, in the ongoing process of developing innovative and continuous strategies for effective mental healthcare.

It is thanks to your efforts to organise such events, that these much-needed synergies are being encouraged, and more information is being disseminated about psychiatric and mental health nursing.

These events create an opportunity to work in wider synergies, due to the fact that people from different nations come together to share a wider spectrum of good practices.

Such events also help in building stronger communities and societies, and to share knowledge across all borders.

We must work together, transcending all borders, to address global issues of mental health, which are having such a far-reaching effect across our nations.

In fact, this is our duty too, as stipulated in the United Nations' Agenda 2030, and its Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 3.4, which reads, and I quote,

“reduce by one-third pre-mature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment, and promote mental health and wellbeing”. End quote.

We must also ensure that everyone is aware of the shocking indicators from the World Health Organisation, which tell us that suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15 to 29 year-olds.

Another sad indicator is that over 300 million people are now living with depression, which is an increase of more than 18%, that was registered between 2005 and 2015.

SDG 3 must be considered a challenge, to further commit ourselves to act.

In line with this, we must do more to tackle these realities, with effective educational strategies among all relevant stakeholders, including our schools and educational authorities.

Let me also take this opportunity to commend the efforts of the Malta Association of Psychiatric Nurses, when, last month, they launched an official standards document for mental health specialists, which followed an intensive process of development.

I am pleased to note that this document has made history within the psychiatric nursing profession in Malta.

This document is a source of pride and validation for every nurse, working in mental health in the Maltese Islands.

Let me say how proud I am of this recent initiative. I would like to extend my thanks, on behalf of Maltese, for the work that has been done by the Malta Association of Psychiatric Nurses.

In concluding, let me encourage you all to keep working in synergy, to ensure that we keep up the momentum, united across our nations and in solidarity as one world.

Let us ensure that all individuals experiencing mental health difficulties, receive the full respect which is their due, and that the dignity and the wellbeing of each and every person, remains our first priority.

Thank you, and I very much look forward to the outcomes of your deliberations.