

Opening Speech, delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, at the Malta Association of Occupational Therapists (MAOT) Conference with the theme “Traumatic Injuries: the Road to Recovery”, 31 October 2018

Distinguished guests,
Dear friends,

I would like to take this opportunity, at the beginning of this conference, to thank the Malta Association of Occupational Therapists, in particular Mr Demis Cachia and his team, for having organised today’s important conference.

It is truly my pleasure to share some introductory remarks to stimulate further thought for your discussions about the issue of traumatic injuries.

May this conference, through your deliberations, help you to share further expertise in the best interest of the individuals who experience such challenges.

As occupational therapists, you play a most essential role in the lives of people who suffer from traumatic injuries. Indicators from the Council of Occupational Therapists for the European Countries (COTEC) show us that the number of occupational therapists in the European Union is increasing.

I take this as clear evidence, of how much our European countries believe in the importance of your profession, and taking the issue of traumatic injuries seriously.

I also believe that these indicators are evidence that our European countries are further their investment, to provide the necessary professional care in this sector.

Undoubtedly, occupational therapists are invaluable contributors to the wellbeing of our society. You are ensuring that people who suffer from traumatic injuries will receive appropriate treatment and support, and therefore, can successfully reintegrate into their respective communities.

In this context, rehabilitation often begins in a hospital environment, with a focus on regaining the physical skills to be able to become independent again. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge the need for the provision of holistic services to the injured, beyond emergency care.

I am sure we all agree, that further rehabilitation, which is conducted and is given in a community setting, is the most effective.

Community-level rehabilitation encourages patients to return to their lives, in the most effective, efficient, and holistic way possible.

As we all know, many people with moderate or severe injuries will need ongoing and regular rehabilitation, to regain their full functions.

Therefore, such holistic approaches are vital for individuals to transit into the maximum quality of life possible.

In this context of community-level rehabilitation, I am convinced that occupational therapists have a better chance to assess and evaluate progress, because community level rehabilitation gives the opportunity to follow an individual at every step of his or her recovery, from hospital to home.

Community-based rehabilitation is part of the continuum of care that not only provides the much-needed assistance for individuals recovering from traumatic injuries, but also to regain essential skills and, most importantly, for the injured individuals to feel they are regaining their rightful dignity.

I believe that community-based rehabilitation provides an ideal environment, to focus on the physical and psychological functioning, the mobility, the social integration, the productivity, the self-confidence, and the independent life skills of the injured individuals.

I am confident that, thanks to your education, training, experience and good practises, you are the experts to ensure the full inclusion and integration of people, who are recovering from traumatic injuries, back into Maltese society.

Their inclusion and integration must not only be seen as an intrinsic and important contribution to the quality of life of the individual, but also, as an invaluable contribution to the socio-economic wellbeing of our whole society.

As occupational therapists, you know what methods will work best, to address their needs, and to achieve effective improvements by re-learning and re-adapting to their daily lives.

As occupational therapists, you do not only address the physical needs of your patients. Very often, you also need to respond to their emotional and psychological needs too.

Therefore, this means that it is crucial for you, as occupational therapists, to work as part of a team, in synergy with medical doctors, psycho-social specialists, and other professionals, to provide the most holistic form of care that is possible.

Working in a multi- and/or inter-disciplinary approach, is key to the holistic wellbeing of the individual and society at large.

Let me also take this opportunity to encourage you to continue to listen to the voices of the individuals with traumatic injuries.

I am so pleased that this conference is providing a space for individuals, who have suffered from traumatic injuries, to share their lived experiences. I am convinced that when they share their narratives, they will create an enlightening opportunity for you, to further your knowledge as professionals.

I believe that it is also important to listen to the families and friends of these individuals, because all of them are part of an essential network, who many-a-time will also need emotional and psychological care themselves.

Families and friends of such individuals are an important link for the necessary rehabilitation, as they are best placed to help in the provision of the necessary care and support.

Every individual is unique and every injury or challenge is different, therefore, each plan for treatment and reintegration must be personalised.

In this context, this approach places a lot of responsibility on your shoulders, to respect the individuality of each person, and to facilitate their recovery, by working in synergy with their care-givers and family members.

I am convinced that your expertise, together with your dedication, make you catalyst, to improve the quality of life of so many people and their families in the Maltese Islands.

Individuals who are experiencing trauma, vulnerability, and the subsequent risk of social exclusion, will look up to you for direction to take up once again the root to enjoy their life, their families and friends.

That is how vital and invaluable you are, as professions in this sector.

On concluding, I would like to emphasise how proud I am of the work that you are doing..... and..... on behalf of our communities, and our society as a whole, I would like to thank you for your priceless endeavours.

Thank you for your attention, and I augur you a constructive conference.