

ENDEAVOUR SCHOLARSHIP (GROUP B)

I enrolled for a Masters Degree in Renal Transplantation Science with the University of Liverpool in 2015. I had already completed my specialist training in Nephrology and General Medicine, however I felt that this was an excellent opportunity to further my knowledge in the interesting and rapidly evolving field of renal transplantation. Malta was at the time finalising an important agreement with a transplant immunology centre in Rome (Centro Regionale Trapianti Lazio), ensuring that our patients' immunological work up prior to transplantation is on par with the current standard of care worldwide.

The MSc was an online distance-learning course which delivered up to date knowledge and evidence based clinical experience in renal transplantation science. It was composed of four modules and a dissertation which included a systematic review and research proposal. All four modules included lectures, case discussions including real-life clinical scenarios, critical appraisal of scientific papers and assignments. An online discussion forum enabled continuous discussion between candidates and tutors.

My dissertation was entitled "Desensitisation therapies and clinical outcomes in human leucocyte antigen (HLA) incompatible kidney transplantation". Locally we perform about 20 kidney transplants a year and about 15% of our wait-listed patients are highly sensitised. Kidney paired exchange, combined with desensitisation in challenging cases, should be the first option for the difficult to match highly sensitised patients. This is because their chance of finding a compatible transplant is low. Furthermore there is a higher risk of rejection and long term graft loss with HLA incompatible transplantation. Unfortunately small centres face enormous challenges due to a smaller donor pool and restricted resources. Currently, we do not perform kidney paired exchange or HLA incompatible transplantation locally. Collaboration with a larger overseas transplant centre remains the best option for our highly sensitised patients.

The MSc was definitely a period of academic growth where I mastered the important skills of critical thinking and reflective learning. It gave me the opportunity to share ideas and discuss challenging cases with colleagues working in different centres. I have applied the knowledge acquired from my degree to my day-to-day practice thus ensuring that local practice and protocols meet international standards; as well as providing evidenced-based care for my patients. I also ensure that this newfound knowledge and expertise is passed on to other members of my team. Finally, I am grateful to the ENDEAVOUR Scholarship scheme for making this journey possible.

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