**From Aspiration to Reality: When TESS Paved the Path to a Doctorate in Pharmacy**

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With the hopes of continuing to accomplish my academic and professional objectives, I chose to further my studies by following the three-year post-graduate Doctorate in Pharmacy course offered by the University of Malta, in conjunction with the University of Illinois in Chicago, which focuses on patient-centred pharmaceutical services and medication evaluation by integrating clinical pharmacy practice and evidence-based research. The course aims to develop a number of advanced skills related to clinical pharmacy, pharmaceutical policies and patient-centred pharmaceutical regulatory aspects. These include; establishing leadership and inter-professional aspects, developing novel processes and practice scenarios, identifying priorities for pharmacy service, developing policies which support patient care and access to tailor-made therapies, as well as evaluating innovative therapies. Furthermore, the programme provides tools which enable assessment of theoretical knowledge, concepts and principles related to the pharmaceutical field. In gaining these reflective and evaluation skills, it was possible to carry out novel research in the pharmaceutical scenario. These aims were achieved over the course of the programme by means of three main parts.

The first of these is the taught aspect of the Doctoral degree. Modules tackled by local and international lecturers include pharmacotherapeutics, principles of pharmacoeconomics, health systems in USA and Europe, and drug information and statistics. Skills related to critical evaluation of literature, the retrieval and analysis of information acquired, the application of statistical tools, and legal and ethical aspects of research which ensure patient safety is observed at all times, are also developed during the course of the programme. The second part of the programme consists of experientials and clinical rotations which involve joining a team of healthcare professionals in the secondary healthcare setting and obtaining a hands-on experience in patient management including the taking of patient medication history, identifying pharmaceutical care issues, development of a pharmaceutical care plan, management of pharmacotherapy, patient monitoring, patient counselling and medication reconciliation activities. This provides the necessary tools to work in multi-disciplinary care teams to implement optimal pharmaceutical care in the hospital, ambulatory and community pharmacy scenario by means of quality and safety improvement initiatives in relation to medication use.

The doctoral programme was concluded by carrying out a doctoral research dissertation in the area of pharmaceutical entrepreneurship. The knowledge and skills required to develop and progress new pharmaceutical endeavours were identified through the study of concepts in entrepreneurship in pharmaceutical processes. In the context of this study, pharmaceutical entrepreneurship is viewed as a result of innovative thinking, the taking of calculated risks when conducting pharmaceutical entrepreneurial ventures, and evidence-based decision making in relation to a progressive innovative pharmaceutical scenario.

This degree was carried out following the award of a Tertiary Education Scholarship, granted by the Ministry of Education, which has been instrumental in supporting my academic journey, enabling me to focus on advancing the skills and knowledge required to push forward policies, developments in pharmaceutical practice and the provision of service, based on scientific and evidence-based principles.