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MCFD warns that this festive period cannot be like last Summer

As Malta enters the winter months Family Doctors/General Practitioners are seeing more patients attending their private clinics and Health Centres. An increasing number of people have health concerns related to the seasonal surge of respiratory tract infections expected as the temperature cools. Many individuals have health concerns which were postponed during the past months and there is a noticeable rise in symptoms related to both the stress and the lack of exercise that the past months forced upon many of us.

On one hand, family doctors continue to be available in the current circumstances to preserve the physical, social and psychological wellbeing of all citizens. All the other medical conditions, over and above the current numbers of SARS-CoV-2 infections, continue to affect the health of those involved and their families, and these must be given their due attention.

On the other hand, the MCFD warns that the period around Christmas and the New Year celebrations cannot be like last summer, when most caution was thrown aside by many, with a subsequent surge in the number of COVID-19 positive cases. The higher the number of cases the higher the risk of admissions in hospital and death of vulnerable people, the larger the number of people in quarantine, the greater the number of people off work and the further the lack of income in already difficult financial times for a substantial part of the population. MCFD encourages all to heed the advice of the Superintendence of Public Health and restrict celebrations to within the same household so as to protect the vulnerable, including the elderly. The means and technologies of yesterday and today can be used to maintain the social contacts that we all crave and currently miss.

The MCFD notes the questions raised by an increasing number of patients about COVID-19 vaccines with family doctors. The MCFD points out that vaccination and not merely the availability of vaccines can, together with disciplined social restrictions and wearing face masks, protect the vulnerable and help us to come out of the pandemic. The MCFD encourages citizens to consult their caring physician to get the

up-to-date information about the available vaccines and subsequent vaccination; conversely citizens are to be wary of fake news and hoax.

Finally, it is very important, especially now, that patients learn to recognise mild viral illnesses, and are equipped with the knowledge and the confidence to 'self-care' for mild illnesses, or those of their loved ones. The MCFD has published a 'Self-Care' guide for the general public. Self-care means treating mild illnesses at home, using rest, nutrition, and sometimes over-the-counter medicines. Self-care helps avoid the spread of infections in crowded waiting rooms, minimises unnecessary use of medications, and helps reduce the burden on health care services. In the current and future scenario of COVID-19 cases it is imperative that health care services are protected to allow the focus on those more in need. The document explains the symptoms of mild viral illnesses, and why they occur. It outlines the basics of treatment, as well as what commonly-used medicines are safe to use as needed. It also includes a list of 'red flag' symptoms to look out for, and who to speak to if they occur. The document is available in both Maltese and English, and the public and healthcare personnel are encouraged to use and share it. The documents can be viewed and downloaded at the links: <https://mcfcd.org.mt/generalpublic/selfcare>

Footnotes:

The Malta College of Family Doctors (MCFD) is a Voluntary Organisation (VO/0973) that strives to improve the academic and clinical performance of family doctors (known as “it-tobba tal-familja” or “general practitioners”) and the standards of primary health care in our country. www.mcfcd.org.mt