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## **Press Release World Family Doctors Day – 19<sup>th</sup> May 2025**

### **'Building Mental Resilience in a Changing World'**

The Malta College of Family Doctors (MCFD) and the Association of Private Family Doctors (APFD), on the occasion of World Family Doctor's Day, in line with the message of the World Organization of National Colleges, Academies and Academic Associations of General Practitioners/Family Physicians (WONCA), look forward for further steps that strengthen our mental health services to improve people's health.

World Family Doctor Day, celebrated annually on May 19th, is a key event in the calendar of family doctors. It is dedicated to highlighting the vital contributions of family doctors in healthcare systems worldwide. This year the focus is on emphasizing the pivotal role of family medicine in supporting mental health and resilience. Mental health is taking an ever-increasing impact on our society, as society and communities are changing, and changing fast.

Over the past decades our country has invested in capital and human resources to improve in the relevant mental health issues, but the extent of the issue means that more and more needs to be done. In particular, our healthcare structure regularly invests heavily in diagnosing and treating illnesses and diseases once they happen, and relatively underinvests in health promotion and disease prevention.

The 2 Voluntary Organisations encourage more investment in primary care, including health promotion and disease prevention, as it builds mental resilience. Family doctors are uniquely positioned to nurture mental wellness through continuous, person-centred care, early

intervention and holistic support, helping patients manage life's stressors effectively, and decreasing the occurrence of mental illness and diseases.

Family doctors are often the first to see signs of mental health struggles like anxiety, depression, and stress. Their continuous, long-term relationships with patients allow them to identify and address mental health challenges proactively, improving patients' resilience and overall well-being. The MCFD and the APFD encourage sustained investment in family medicine, such that family doctors continue to be trained appropriately to present day and upcoming challenges, and subsequently are given the necessary tools to perform the activities in which they have been trained.

The MCFD and the APFD point out that improving the resilience of a community means prioritizing the mental health care of both patients and the service providers, as they exist in a loop. A positive feedback loop is where both service providers (including doctors) and patients thrive. Work-life balance should be an aim of all institutions. Supporting investment in mentorship, accessible training, and peer networks ensures that service providers remain effective and compassionate caregivers. Some suggestions include:

- implementing policies that ensure protected time away from clinical duties, not only for vacation leave, but also for continuous professional development and recovery after duties;
- Encouraging both public and private health institutions and employers to adopt health-positive workplace cultures;
- Integrating mental wellness metrics and staff satisfaction into national health system performance indicators;
- Supporting research and regular audits into clinician burnout, and use findings to inform staffing levels, workload distribution, and retention strategies;
- Encouraging peer-to-peer reflection groups like Balint groups, which are known to reduce professional isolation and burnout while enhancing professional growth.

The 2 Voluntary organisations call for a reset of the perception of what mental wellness is about. Mental wellness is not about achieving perfection, but of being resilient and adaptable. Mental wellness is not about unattainable ideals of mental health, but about empowering individuals and communities to navigate life's challenges constructively. Primary care can promote realistic strategies for coping with life's inevitable ups and downs if given the necessary resources to educate, understand and support the community.

Family doctors play a crucial role in promoting the health and well-being of individuals and communities as they are a trusted source of support for patients and families, and would support the necessary strong decisions moving forwards.

## Notes

1. World Family Doctor Day, 19th May, was first declared by WONCA in 2010 and has become a day to highlight the role and contribution of family doctors in health care systems around the world. The event is an opportunity to acknowledge the central role of our specialty in the delivery of personal, comprehensive and continuing health care for all of our patients. It is also a chance to celebrate the progress being made in family medicine and the special contributions of family doctors globally.
2. WONCA is an acronym for the World Organization of National Colleges, Academies and Academic Associations of General Practitioners/Family Physicians. WONCA's short name is World Organization of Family Doctors. The Mission of WONCA is to improve the quality of life of the peoples of the world through defining and promoting its values, including respect for universal human rights and including gender equity, and by fostering high standards of care in general practice/family medicine. <https://www.globalfamilydoctor.com>
3. 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.
4. The Association of Private Family Doctors (APFD) on the other hand, is a Voluntary Organisation (VO/1803) that strives to improve family medicine and primary health care in our country on behalf of the private family doctors (known as “it-tobba tal-familja” or “general practitioners”) and their patients.

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