

In sickness and in Health – *we are all human*

A public statement by the Malta Chamber of Psychologists- 11th September, 2017

The Malta Chamber of Psychologists yesterday issued a public statement reiterating the importance of respecting the integrity of public officials, as well as the general public, when it comes to diagnosis of mental illnesses and any such psychological conditions. In recent weeks, we have seen personal and vile attacks on the likes of Mario Galea, Adrian Delia, Dr. Mark Xuereb, Robert Musumeci, Franco Debono and others; with allegations of mental instability being used as weapons against them. This simply is NOT on! Diagnoses of any mental health related difficulties can and should ONLY be given by people trained in the mental health professions. It is totally unacceptable that any such diagnoses are thrown about lightly as they are dangerous, hurtful and unethical to say the least, when coming from journalists or lay people, since they may give erroneous information and also continue to reinforce a stigma – WHICH WE HAVE LONG WORKED TO COMBAT- with regards to mental health issues. It is also impossible for a lay person to decipher the severity of any mental health issue, since such conditions vary greatly, and until properly and adequately assessed, cannot conclude ones' incapacity in their occupancy of any position or role in their life. We thus urge and appeal to journalists for more sensitivity, tact and awareness.

Some reference was recently made to the Constitutional clause stating that public officials can be removed from their occupancy *if he is interdicted or incapacitated for any mental infirmity or for prodigality by a court in Malta, or is otherwise determined in Malta to be of unsound mind*". Needless to say, this clause refers directly to people who are no longer capable - i.e. disabled from - performing the duties and tasks responsible to them; albeit, any such decision would have to be supported by a battery of psychological tests and a thorough evaluation process. The MCP affirms strongly that it is unacceptable for people to be judged, labelled, ostracised, condemned, prejudiced or discriminated against, for merely voicing their tendency to suffer from any one or more mental health conditions.

It is not uncommon for most people in the general population, to suffer from some form of mental health issue at some point in their lives. In fact, one in four people will experience some form of anxiety, some form of addiction, some degree of depression, one or more phobia/s, and some sort of psychological crisis during their lifetime. Some conditions are hereditary, some environmental and others brought on by trauma's in everyday life. There are also a wide range of personality disorders which many people may suffer from. In fact, it is common knowledge that the majority of us are simply well composed neurotics doing our best to go about our business and make our mark in the world. Quoting the great Marcel

Proust, *“Everything great in the world comes from neurotics. They alone have founded our religions and composed our masterpieces. .. never will the world be aware of how much it owes to them, nor above all what they have suffered in order to bestow their gifts on it”*. Abraham Lincoln, Pope Francis, Bishop Cremona, Nikola Tesla, Vincent Van Gogh, are all amongst great people who are themselves known to have suffered from mental health difficulties.

Most people diagnosed with mental health conditions or psychological problems generally fair very well in their everyday lives, thriving in their professional and work life, without anybody even noticing that they have any difficulties. Most people with mental illnesses keep it a secret and can usually cope well when under the right care and medical treatment. If all the people who sought the help of mental health practitioners, failed to function well at work, we would have a serious crisis on our hands!

We at MCP applaud the bravery of public figures who have had the courage to come forward and speak about their mental health difficulties, since it only supports the premise that we are all human; *all vulnerable in our own way*. Neither one of us is immune from having psychological issues and neither one of us can exclude the possibility of one day having to battle with a mental health condition of sorts. In fact, the MCP urge people of all ages to take great care of their mental health, especially those occupying highly stressful jobs. We would like to think that in these delicate moments, we will find a community who is accepting, knowledgeable and supportive; not a community who is ready to condemn or to denigrate people for being human. We all have the responsibility to work towards the wellbeing of our society, by fostering an environment of tolerance and care; stopping people from denigrating others in the name of mental health being a definite way forward.

Any queries or comments can be addressed to info@mcp.org.mt