

'There is help when need arises'

Dementia Action Week raises awareness on debilitating disease

Simblija Care Home, which forms part of Hilltop Gardens in Naxxar, recently held a Dementia Action Week, with the aim of raising awareness on the debilitating disease.

"We believe that awareness on this condition is lacking," said Charmaine Attard, director general of the home.

"Families struggle every day to cope with loved ones with dementia and often may not have the skills or the knowledge of how to cope with them or where they can refer to.

"Families need to know that there is help when the need arises, be it for day care, respite when they get tired or long-term care if it becomes too much to care for a loved one with dementia at home."

The home opened a unit specifically for clients with dementia in February to cater for their specific needs.

The Butterfly Memory Support Unit has been designed with dementia in mind both through the colour schemes and also through the furniture and soft furnishings used.

"The rooms are very spacious, offering privacy and dignity to the residents," pointed out Ms Attard.

All rooms have electric height-adjustable beds and are supported by the latest medical equipment.

All have an en suite bathroom with brightly-coloured doorways to be easily identified.

The bathroom is visible from where the resident is lying in bed to help him or her remember to access it if needed. Floors within the bathrooms are non-slip, have hand rails and the sanitary ware has colour contrast for easy identification.

Memory boxes outside the rooms help to make rooms identifiable through photos or trinkets. There is signage all through the unit to make it easy for clients to find their way.

"The unit has a warm comfortable living room feel. It also has a dining room where residents are served food cooked in-house by our own chefs and which is adapted to the various needs or



Memory boxes outside the rooms in the Butterfly Memory Support Unit help to make rooms identifiable through photos or trinkets.

likes and dislikes they may have," said Ms Attard.

Qualified nurses and care assistants are purposely trained to assist the residents 24/7.

"Clients who suffer from dementia need various levels of assistance which may vary from tips to remind them to perform their activities of daily living, like washing and dressing, to total care where the elderly person may need total assistance to wash, dress, mobilise and eat," said Ms Attard.

"They also need to be surrounded by people who understand the disease process and how it may manifest itself in order to deal with them effectively and communicate with them in the right way. Staff, therefore, need to recognise their needs and be able to communicate with them even



All rooms have electric height-adjustable beds and are supported by all the latest medical equipment.

when this becomes difficult. We also support the relatives who may be struggling with the reality of having a mother or a

father suffer from dementia and who need guidance on how to deal with them." Clients can also attend a daily programme

of activities such as music, drama, pet therapy, art and crafts, specifically designed for them.

4th national coeliac awareness conference

Knut Lundin, a professor of medicine at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Oslo, Norway and a leading consultant gastroenterologist at the Endoscopy Unit at Oslo University Hospital Rikshospitalet, was keynote speaker at the fourth national coeliac awareness conference, organised by Narrative Structures and held under the patronage of President Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca.

Speaking at Verdala Palace, Prof. Lundin, who is also president of the European Society for the Study of Coeliac Disease, spoke about coeliac disease and non-coeliac gluten sensitivity, which involves

people who test negative for coeliac disease but who still feel unwell after consuming gluten.

He said the latter could be hypersensitive to gluten – and there are many who are or could also be reacting to a group of carbohydrates which could include or exclude gluten, referred to as FODMAPs. Foods high in FODMAPs include bread, barley, yoghurt, apples, apricots, pears and cauliflower.

Two weeks ago, *The Sunday Times of Malta* and Narrative Structures revealed that Malta would soon start screening children for coeliac disease by taking a blood drop from the fingertip.

The massive project, which will include schoolchildren and is called the ITAMA project, is being financed by the European Fund of the Programme INTERREG Italia-Malta. It officially kicked off last Friday.

The screening forms part of a larger project which involves tools for the diagnosis of autoimmune disease in the Mediterranean. It is being led by the Department of Physics and Chemistry at the University of Palermo and directed by Prof. Giuseppe Raso. Malta is a partner in the project with Prof. Giuseppe Magazzu, director of the Paediatric Gastroenterology and Cystic Fibrosis Unit, University

Hospital Policlinico G. Martino in Messina as clinical director of the coeliac disease section of the project.

The conference was supported by Barilla and Golden Harvest, as well as Dr Schar and Peak's Free From, together with NGOs (Malta Coeliac Association, Maltese Paediatric Association and Malta College of Family Doctors) and the Times of Malta as media partner.

In 2015, Narrative Structures launched its first national coeliac conference. For more information, e-mail information@narrativestructures.com or look up Narrative Structures on Facebook.