The objectives of this visit to Malta included:

- preparing and presenting material to be included in a module on men's health
- participating in sessions on distance education
- sharing views on Gender and Health with international and interdisciplinary partners in Norway, Sweden, Italy, Spain and Australia.
- negotiating modules for a master's degree on Gender and Health for international health care workers, representing a number of health care disciplines.

The workshop sessions lasted daily from 17:00, enabling contacts to be established with the following persons:

- Mr P Thomas, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK
- Dr D Walker, Commonwealth of Learning, Victoria, Australia
- Dr D Mazza, Medical Director, Human Resource Development Division, Commonwealth Secretariat, London
- Dr J McIntyre, Chris Hani/Baragwanath Hospital, Johannesburg, RSA
- Mr P Thomas, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK
- Dr D Walker, Commonwealth of Learning
- Dr D Mazza, Medical Director, Human Resource Development Division, Commonwealth Secretariat

The Technical Support Group, Health Department, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, was the visited persons from a number of Commonwealth countries to participate in a workshop, focussing on designing modules for a master's degree for health care workers on Gender and Health, utilising distance education techniques. The workshop sessions lasted daily from 08:00 until 17:00, followed by organised activities during the evenings. These activities included a gala dinner, excursions to historic places of interest and a visit from Malta's Minister of Health. Various fruitful suggestions arose from these informal contacts during the evening activities. It proved to be much easier to oppose any person's standpoint during small informal discussions than during the organised formal workshop sessions. The workshop was well organised, enabling participants to be actively engaged in pursuing the goals of the workshop whilst establishing international and interdisciplinary health care contacts. Within four weeks after the completion of the workshop, each participant had to submit his/her revised module for the proposed master's degree in Gender and Health. During 1999 the Technical Support Group, Health Department, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, will decide which modules will be incorporated and which ones will be core or optional modules. The presenters of the core modules will probably be requested to participate in a follow-up workshop during 2000.

Personal objectives included visiting the Department of Nursing, University of Malta, offering a four year BSc degree in nursing. Despite numerous efforts from the RSA and from Malta, this proved to be impossible as the Department of Nursing was engaged in an international conference during this specific week. Attempts to visit St Luke's Hospital, the Government Hospital of Malta also failed to materialise. The Chinese delegation considered making substantial financial contributions towards enlarging the 700-bed St Luke's Hospital. Hospital and medical care (as well as education) are provided free of charge to Maltese citizens at government institutions. Although many people visit their private medical practitioners and pay for these services out of their own pockets, most people go to the government hospital for free hospital treatment. Only one small private hospital exists in Malta - a visit also proved to be impossible because the managers claimed that the hospital had not yet been fully commissioned.

Although none of the personal objectives could be realised, the workshop proved to be most worthwhile, learning about gender and health issues from international and interdisciplinary experts, and being able to present a session on men's health as well as participating in many other sessions on women's health and distance education issues.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Technical Support Group, Health Department, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, for inviting me to participate in this workshop and for financing all my expenses. My colleagues from the Department of Advanced Nursing, University of Malta, are thanked for enabling us to attend this workshop during the week, a number of them had to assume additional responsibilities during my absence.

Points of interest about Malta
Malta consists of three islands, Malta, Gozo and Comino, linked by regular ferry trips. Comino is a small island with one hotel, where no cars or tractors or any other noisy machinery are allowed. Gozo seems to be a peaceful island where large numbers of elderly people and fishermen live. Malta, and especially its capital, Valetta, is bustling with tourists and shops. During April 1998 one Maltese Lire's value equalled that of 1.5 UK pounds - approximately £15.00 for 1 Maltese Lire. The total population of Malta is estimated to be 357,000. Malta - a language akin to Arabic - is spoken by most inhabitants, but the Maltese are fluent in English as this is the language taught in schools. A large number of Maltese also speak Italian fluently, because of its close geographical position to Italy and because of its historical links with Italy (Berlitz, 1997: 8-10). The majority of Maltese adhere to the Roman Catholic faith. Beautifully decorated churches can be visited throughout the islands of Malta and Gozo.

Unemployment is a problem in Malta and large numbers of young people need to find jobs in other countries, especially in Australia, the USA and in Canada. The economic activities of Malta revolve around tourism and building, ship repairing and light industries. Work in the ship building industry is so skilled that the whole job can be done by one person on board. Other economic activities include agriculture, banking and insurance. The Maltese are very proud of their island and its history. The hardships of Malta's people during World War II is well documented by Joseph Attard in The battle of Malta; an epic true story of suffering and bravery. Malta gained its independence from Britain during 1964. Malta proved to be a historical paradise to explore - the only regret being a lack of time to learn more about this fascinating place in the Mediterranean Sea. A fervent hope is fostered to revisit these three islands - with more time and money.

References

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REPORT ON OVERSEAS VISIT TO MALTA: 30 MARCH 1998 - 3 APRIL 1998
Dr Valerie Ehlers, Department of Advanced Nursing Sciences, Unisa.

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References