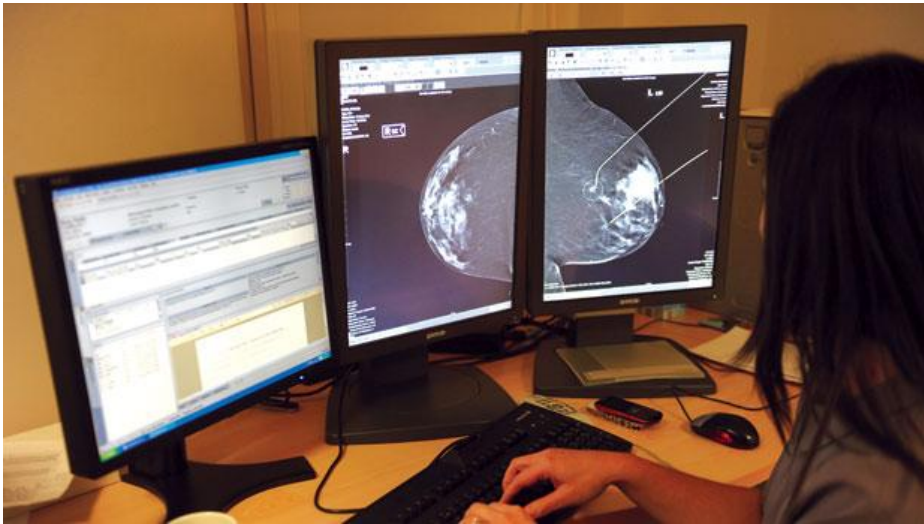


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## Young team giving tumours the needle

### Newly qualified radiologists bring extra skills to Mater Dei



Radiologists are offering new life-saving treatments at Mater Dei. Photos Jason Borg

Some types of kidney cancers can now be eradicated without the need of surgery – by means of the insertion of a microwave needle – and with the patient being able to go home the next day.

A group of young radiologists have recently completed their six-year training in Malta and abroad and are offering new services at Mater Dei which were previously either not available or only available abroad.

Kelvin Cortis, a young hepatobiliary radiologist, points at a scan of internal organs on his computer screen. "This is the kidney of a patient of mine: that black spot there was a tumour," he says.

"We treated that by means of interventional oncology: which means we burnt up the tumour with high temperatures by inserting a special 'needle' which works like an antenna and transmits microwave or radio frequencies in the body organ."

He shows the fresh scan taken after the intervention – the black spot is there no more. "No stitching, the kidney is saved and the patient is back home the next day."

Another patient had chemotherapeutic agents directly infused in the tumour in order to shrink it. Because the medication is localised, the side effects are reduced drastically.

Dr Cortis is one of five radiologists who have recently completed their training in hospitals abroad in different sub-specialties.



Talented team: Kelvin Cortis, Kristian Micallef, Warren Scicluna and Jessica Muscat.

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Kristian Micallef has specialised in gastro-intestinal radiology. Back at Mater Dei, he has introduced the concept of virtual colonoscopies, where the diagnosis is more precise and patients can do away with the uncomfortable colonoscopy in which an instrument with a camera is inserted in the body.

Reuben Grech is an interventional neuroradiologist and will soon be starting a thrombolysis service in which blood clots in the brain can be removed in acute stroke patients.

*It works by transmitting microwave or radio frequencies in the body organ*

"This is particularly of benefit to Malta due to our small size – the time to reach Mater Dei is short enough for operations like these to be successfully carried out in time," said Dr Cortis.

Warren Scicluna specialised in uro-radiology – radiology of the kidney, bladder, prostate, penis and testicles.

"Thanks to MRI guided biopsies, tumours can be located better and the staging of cancer is clearer and this determines the treatment that the patient requires," Dr Scicluna said.

Their colleague Jessica Muscat, who specialised in paediatric and breast radiology, was keen to highlight that the five of them are merely building on the foundations that they found. "This is not about us, we are merely part of a new diagnostic pathway."

The radiologists chose their area of sub-specialisation under the guidance of their post-graduate training coordinator Adrian Mizzi. "Dr Mizzi identified our strengths, and each one of us followed a different path so we would be able to offer different services to Maltese patients," said Dr Muscat.

Before they set up offices at Mater Dei this year, urgent cases used to be sent to hospitals abroad or else wait for a visiting consultant radiologist.

"But he was able to come only twice a year and had only time for the most urgent of cases – maybe four patients each time," said Dr Cortis.

Since July Dr Cortis has seen about 40 patients and his colleagues have also increased their patients tenfold.

The radiologists are now hoping to be able to obtain a contrast ultrasound machine.

"We are trying to get the funds for it. It cost €130,000. It would do away with radiation, we would be able to see more patients and it would make diagnosis even more accurate.

"The contrast ultrasound could be carried out instead of the more costly MRI and the money of the machine would easily be recouped," they said.

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