



VdGM Statement in response to Minister Manuel Heitor's comments with regards to Family Medicine training.

The Vasco da Gama Movement read with dismay the comments of Minister Manuel Heitor in his interview on the 2nd of September with the Jornal Diario de Noticias. As an organisation that represents Family Medicine residents, and Family Doctors in the early stages of their career, we feel we need to raise our concerns about the implications of the Minister's comments.

Family Doctors are an essential, and highly skilled part of all healthcare systems. It has been made clear time and time again that we are an essential component to provide high quality universal healthcare. It has also repeatedly been shown that a well-trained, well-funded and -supported primary care system is excellent value for money. It reduces the burden on secondary care, and improves outcomes for the general population from the comfort and safety of their own communities.

For high quality family physicians, high quality, rigorous and supportive training is required. This, complemented with a system that supports new Family Doctors following completion of training, is more likely to result in a reliable workforce for the future.

To imply that the training of Family doctors is less important and less rigorous than in other specialties is insulting and misleading. It is also dangerous to simply compare the length of training programmes without considering their details and structure, the wider training structures, and the specific needs of the countries and their communities. These factors must be considered in addition to the increasing complexity of the healthcare needs. This implication unfortunately also brings forward the idea that Family Physicians are lesser than other specialists; it undermines the high level of knowledge and skills necessary to perform this vital role.

We strongly urge the Minister and the Government in which he serves, to trust and listen to the Portuguese Medical Council (Ordem dos Médicos), and all relevant associations and unions who represent Portuguese medical professionals. Where possible, the Government should discuss and formulate plans in collaboration with these groups as this is much more likely to yield an effective, sustainable system of healthcare that will best serve all communities in Portugal, now and for the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Mamo', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Nick Mamo

VdGM President

25th September 2021