

## Editor's Page

# Modernisation of Scientific Institutions: An Urgent Need for Viability and Progress

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**S**cientific institutions in Greece, especially those involved with medical education and the provision of health services, are undergoing a steady decline as the result of a variety of factors, some well-known and others less so. The lack of capable management and adequate financial planning, the stifling public sector atmosphere, nepotism and favours, the lack of replacement of core personnel, are some of the reasons for this difficult passage.

The universities, and especially the medical schools, which in theory should be the foci of new ideas, rejuvenation and progress, have been stagnating for some time. Rather than taking advantage of the opportunities for modernisation offered by the law, they have instead remained mired in incestuous practices of blind mutual support and cronyism, retaining the mindset of an exclusive club. Such a sad state of affairs is bound to deter hopeful and dynamic candidates from exposing themselves to a process that is likely to be suspect and lacking in meritocracy. The upshot of all this is well known: professors of cardiology who have a weak or non-existent research portfolio, who have a negligible presence on the international stage, and who head scientific teams with neither vision nor prospects.

The situation within the hospitals of the National Health System is equally discouraging: advancement without competition, election of directors with poor criteria, and an entire staff made up of the old and disillusioned.

It is interesting that, although this depressing situation is widely recognised, there has been no intervention on the part of the state, the scientific associations, or the governing bodies of higher educational institutions. Quite the contrary: when the establishment has med-

dled in the wider realm of health and education its machinations have been of a blatantly crude nature, aimed principally at muddying the waters and not only neutralising every trace of meritocracy, but at the same time erecting an ideological screen that protects the mediocrity of its followers.

Anyone who is concerned may legitimately wonder about the real reasons behind the disregard for meritocracy in this country. I believe that the reasons are many and the forces at work are complex. First, perhaps, is the long-standing perception that it is "only human" to shore up the mediocre. Then comes the lack of respect for the law, which has sometimes allowed those with little regard for legality or for quality gradually to organise themselves into a majority. Finally, unfortunately, there is the financial lever, which exerts a great deal of force and can achieve its effects either directly or indirectly.

It is only natural for this situation to have medium- and long-term consequences. The corruption and disdain in the public sector institutions and the disillusionment of the competent are the most apparent. Put this together with the lack of any disposition to create centres of excellence and they paint a melancholy picture. The optimistic among us must hope that this complete disregard for merit may spawn new forms of organisation in the long term, when new structures and laws will permit the creation of quality institutions. Such a development must be desired by all those who wrestle with the corruption in our country, while at the same time being aware of developments at the international level.

All of us must continue to fight for modernisation and meritocracy in the higher educational institutions and hospitals, as the only way for Greece to survive and progress in a highly competitive international arena.