

**Mediterranean Rehabilitation Conference
Malta, Forte S. Angelo 11-12 December 2000**

From Peregrinationes III, a publication of the
Accademia Internazionale Melitense

Thalassotherapy

Prof. Gian Luigi Scarpa

Chair of Social Medicine University of Sassari

I think the theme of the conference is very topical and, as holder of the Chair of Social Medicine of the University of Sassari, I am convinced that medicine of the third millennium will be addressed as much to the preservation of health as to its treatment. Four-fifths of diseases derive from an unsuitable lifestyle. Cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, tumours, traffic and occupational accidents are some of the most frequent pathologies and they are social diseases.

Rehabilitation techniques will have an important development during the next millennium because rehabilitation is tertiary prevention and it is the recovery of your state of health, just as health education is primary prevention and guides people towards a correct life style, and the screening of certain diseases is secondary prevention.

Rehabilitation from the results of a disease is the restoration of a state of health as similar as possible to the lost one. Thalassotherapy, which is synergic with rehabilitation techniques, is a very ancient way of recovering one's state of health. The University of Sassari boasts a school of medicine dating back four centuries, with research centres in an incredibly beautiful natural marine park and a great potential for biological, hygienic and clinical research. It has thus decided to announce an International Congress on Thalassotherapy and proposes to study scientifically - with all the thalassotherapy centres who wish to do so - the fortifying and regenerative power of the sea which, coupled with the marine climate, makes thalassotherapy especially effective in the preventive framework.

The new possibilities for developing thalassotherapy arise from modern techniques for using seawater, the most complete spa treatment in existence, and its by-products, and will very likely become a determinant medical practice.

Moreover, those visiting thalassotherapy centres learn how to live and how to combat sickness in true oases of conviviality that foster rest and physical relaxation with a very important social medicine aspect and a different approach to life.

Thalassotherapy is an authentic therapy because it is addressed to often neglected medical phases such as health education and functional recovery from various pathologies, and especially in association with rehabilitation. We are convinced that in the third millennium the "Ars Medicandi" will be the preservation of one's state of health and the existence of disease will mean a failure on the part of medicine.

Within the Mediterranean area there are thousands of seaside hotels that are empty seven to eight months a year and perhaps even more. These structures could be used for thalassotherapy, prevention and rehabilitation with the support of national health systems or with forms of health insurance, that is for restoring the individual to an optimal state of health.

The University of Sassari is therefore announcing an International Congress of Thalassotherapy in cooperation with the International Federation of Thalassotherapy and the Université de la Mer in France. I hope that the Accademia Internazionale Melitense will also want to give its patronage.

The Sassari congress has as its keynote themes the creation of a protocol of intentions to establish a data bank on existing thalassotherapy centres; an official committee of experts who will study the structure and functionality of the centres under the technical and organisational profile; the study of a health education programme within the sphere of the centres; an authentic prevention policy; a scientifically conducted medical research on diseases that can benefit from thalassotherapy, with guidelines to apply in all the centres that will want to support this research programme; the training of healthcare workers; the compulsory health and hygiene criteria for thalassotherapy units with quality standards; and finally the recognition of national health systems and insurance companies.

The creation of an Institute of Sea Science is being planned, within the framework of an existing research centre situated in the marine park of the Golfo di Porto Conte in Alghero. The use of seawater for therapeutic purposes is a millenary practice dating back to the ancient Egyptians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans and even the Knights of Malta, for whom sea and spa bathing were an opportunity to use water and marine products (seaweed, mud) to stimulate, remineralise, relax and regenerate.

I hope therefore that the participants in this conference will honour us with their presence at the Sassari Congress and place their experience in the service of a humanity which has to once again consider health as a "supreme and non negotiable good". The United Nations Assembly had already defined it in 1948 and as the presence of a "complete physical, mental and social wellbeing" not merely as an "absence of disease".