

The Italian Ministry of Health

Rome, 24 January 2007

Dear Doctor Caretta,

I wish to express my deep interest in the subjects proposed for discussion during the international conference entitled, "Communication and Relationships in Medicine: New Perspectives for Medical Etiquette," which will take place in Rome this coming 16th and 17th of February.

I thank you and the organizers for having embarked on such an important endeavor. To promote a medical science based on unwavering respect for the human being - for his dignity and integrity, for his spirit and his culture - encourages a medical practice to meet the challenge posed by suffering, sickness and death by those who have dedicated their personal commitment to the safeguarding of health and quality of life.

All energies used to intervene in the complex world of health care should be directed toward the protection of every woman, elderly or young person's right to enjoy the highest possible standard of physical and mental healthcare regardless of race, creed, political, economic or social condition, in any moment of his/her life.

My conscience urges me to believe in life and the possibility that hope, dignity, a sense of love and sharing with others and with society can always be found - even in this society which often renounces too hastily to consider in depth the sense of human life. Perhaps we are not yet fully aware that we are living in an era in which medical science and health technologies have progressed to the point that confronts us less and less with a net alternative of life or death. But, a new space has now been created for the promotion and protection of human dignity through quality care and human relationships. Today there is a lot - though never enough - of talk about the ethical aspects of end-of-life. However, it is also necessary to pause and

reflect on what should be done so that no one may be left alone and without dignity in his/her "cohabitation" with illness.

Super-specialization in Medicine does achieve important goals although this requires interdisciplinary collaboration, sharing, diffusion of scientific knowledge and humanization in everything that regards the image of the patient as well as that of the doctor. Doctors have to regain their central role of acting and protecting, and to renew their spirit of assistance and passion for caring. We must improve health care and, therefore, improve the attention we give to the patient who is never just a number but a human being asking for empathy, above all when faced with the gravest conditions of distress.

We must, therefore, redefine the modalities and forms of the healthcare system so that it may tend more and more towards meeting the needs and necessities of citizens. In this way, we can contribute to the well-being of the life conditions of everyone: of women in their role as mothers and workers, of children in their process of growing up, of the elderly and of migrants in their search for a better world.

While renewing my compliments for this present initiative, I ask you to extend my greetings to all participants and my most sincere wishes for a fruitful endeavor.

With my esteem,

Livia Turco