



Cabinet distances itself from 'condom cleansing'

RAPHAEL VASSALLO

IT has the flavour of a classic 'whodunnit': a draft document for a National Sexual Health Policy, submitted by the Sexually Transmitted Infections Prevention Committee, was returned by the Health Department with virtually every single mention of the word "condom" deleted... and yet, nobody has assumed responsibility for these changes.

Coming soon after the publication of statistics which suggest a sharp increase of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among adolescents, the decision to water down a draft sexual health policy was met with incredulity among health experts: including Dr Philip Carabot of the Sr Paul Boffa Hospital's genitourinary unit, who described the resulting document as "nothing but a paper exercise with no bite whatsoever."

But government yesterday distanced itself outright from the censorship, with an OPM

official making it clear that "the cabinet of ministers had nothing to do with these deletions."

Similarly, a spokesperson for the health ministry has also denied any involvement, and although she stopped short of defending the decision, communications co-ordinator Amanda Ciappara outlined the minister's position that "condoms are not necessarily the answer".

"It would be wrong to believe that campaigns promoting condom use are the solution to these problems," she said. "The Health Division has never been against advocating the use of condoms. The Division has always conducted its campaigns advocating safe and responsible sexual activity."

Ciappara added that Malta was not isolated in experiencing such changes.

"It is worth putting the Maltese problem within an international perspective. The problem of sexual activity starting at a younger age, the rise in teenage pregnancies and the increasing incidence

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In 1999, government requested experts to draw up a national sexual health policy. Nine years later, the umpteenth attempt has been sabotaged by the health department's resistance to one word: CONDOM

Come on, Eileen... hospital is for serious cases only

RAPHAEL VASSALLO

GONE are the days when you couldn't switch on your TV set without Dejjem Tieghek celebrity Eileen Montesin telling you all about the fantastic new luxury services at the soon-to-be inaugurated Mater Dei Hospital at Tal-Qroqq: the air-condition-

ing, the satellite TV, and the five-star gourmet cuisine.

Today – just over a year later – you are more likely to be shown a bandaged middle-finger, and brusquely told to not bother presenting yourself to the Emergency and Admissions Department, unless your ailment really is an emergency.

"Casualty is for serious and

urgent cases only", the wagging finger warns from billboards and on TV: a far cry from the open invitation, issued in June 2007, for everyone and their ailment to come and pay homage to a state-of-the-art hospital which taken over 15 years to build, at the total cost of more than €750 million.

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Fatherless babies shoot up to 20% in 2007

But NSO stats put figure at 9% - does the discrepancy reveal bogus claims for social benefits?



JAMES DEBONO

THE number of babies born to "unknown fathers" shot up to almost 20% of births in 2007, pointing towards a startling 107% increase in fatherless children – and yet the increase, which is double that of 2006, proves to be rather baffling.

Figures released by minister Austin Gatt in parliament from the public registry claim there were 735 newborn registered with an "unknown father" in 2007.

The increase alone is double that of 2006, where 355 birth certificates were issued with unknown fathers.

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