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Humanistic medical training and One Health approach: an urgent responsibility for Health Sciences education

Formación médica humanista y enfoque One Health: una responsabilidad impostergable para la educación en Ciencias de la Salud

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Dear readers and authors:

Contemporary medical education faces a historic turning point. While scientific and technological advances have decisively transformed the diagnostic and therapeutic capacity of healthcare systems, they are insufficient when not integrated with a comprehensive understanding of health as a biological, social, environmental, and ethical phenomenon. In this context, medical education acquires a strategic role: it must become the effective bridge between scientific knowledge, social justice, and the sustainability of life (Boelen & Heck, 1995; Frenk et al., 2010).

Since the foundational milestones of modern medicine—such as the germ theory of disease and the educational reforms promoted by the Flexner Report at the beginning of the 20th century—evidence demonstrates that rigorous scientific training directly impacts the reduction of mortality, the control of communicable diseases, and the response to global health crises (Frenk et al., 2010). However, current challenges demand transcending an exclusively biomedical perspective. The 21st century is characterized by the convergence of interdependent crises: climate change, biodiversity loss, food insecurity, unplanned urbanization, rising zoonotic diseases, and the persistence of profound social inequalities. These conditions redefine the concept of public health and demand professionals capable of understanding and acting on complex systems (Horton et al., 2014; Romanello et al., 2023). In this context, the One Health approach ceases to be a theoretical option and becomes an urgent training necessity (Pan American Health Organization [PAHO], 2021; World Health Organization [WHO], 2017).

One Health proposes an integrated vision of human, animal, and environmental health, supported by the best available scientific evidence. It recognizes that the well-being of human populations is intrinsically linked to ecosystems and social dynamics (PAHO, 2021; WHO, 2017). Climate change, for example, is not only an environmental problem: it represents one of the greatest contemporary health challenges, with proven effects on morbidity, nutrition, mental health, and the geographic distribution of infectious diseases (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023; PAHO, 2023; Romanello et al., 2023).

Training physicians for this context implies moving beyond the silos of traditional teaching and adopting transdisciplinary educational models, oriented toward research, collaborative work, and the generation of evidence-based public policies (Frenk et al., 2010; General Medical Council [GMC], 2020). Medical science must not only cure; it must transform realities, anticipate risks, and protect the health of future generations (Horton et al., 2014; Whitmee et al., 2015).

Healthcare professionals are the human face of healthcare systems. In their daily practice, they integrate knowledge, technology, and ethics; they act as caregivers, communicators, educators, leaders, and managers (Boelen & Heck, 1995; GMC, 2020). To this multiplicity of roles is now added an unavoidable responsibility: to be active advocates for planetary health and guarantors of sustainable development that preserves life in all its forms (Horton et al., 2014; Whitmee et al., 2015; Romanello et al., 2023).

In this context, academic and scientific exchange spaces, such as international conferences and specialized congresses, play an essential role. They foster ongoing professional development, critical reflection on educational models, strengthening of research skills, and building of cooperative networks among universities, hospitals, and scientific societies (Frenk et al., 2010; GMC, 2020). They also allow for addressing strategic areas ranging from curriculum transformation, accreditation, and the responsible integration of artificial intelligence in medical education, to bioethics, mental health, and leadership in healthcare.

The training of future physicians cannot be limited to the acquisition of technical knowledge. It must be geared toward developing professionals capable of bridging the gap between science and humanity, between technological innovation and social commitment. Understanding that health is not simply about curing but also about prevention, education, support, and actively

confronting inequalities is an ethical and academic imperative (Boelen & Heck, 1995; Frenk et al., 2010).

Twenty-five years after its founding, and within the framework of the ongoing strengthening of its medical program, the San Gregorio University of Portoviejo reaffirms its commitment to a medical education of academic excellence that is deeply humanistic and socially responsible. This education is aligned with local needs and global challenges, viewing health as a fundamental right rather than a privilege (Ministry of Public Health of Ecuador, 2022).

Science, as Marie Curie affirmed, possesses a profound beauty. This beauty is revealed when knowledge is applied with rigor, ethics, and human sensitivity. The challenge for health sciences education is to preserve and project this beauty into the future, contributing to the development of more comprehensive, equitable, and sustainable health systems (Frenk et al., 2010; Horton et al., 2014).

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest.

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