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Editorial

University social responsibility in the hospital setting: integration of the internal environment, health education, and ecological commitment

Responsabilidad social universitaria en el entorno hospitalario: integración del medio interno, educación sanitaria y compromiso ecológico

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University social responsibility (USR) in medical education implies a transformation of the care and training model, oriented toward patient-centered practice, their families, and the environment, as well as toward institutional alignment. The latter encompasses the priority needs of society and is achieved through the integration of teaching, research, and healthcare delivery. In this context, the university hospital acquires a unique dimension, becoming a space where clinical care, professional training, healthcare practice, and interaction with the community converge inseparably [(1)].

This issue of Anales de la Facultad de Ciencias Médicas publishes a study analyzing the perceptions of the academic community regarding university social responsibility in specialist training, revealing that its development remains incipient and is often conceptually confused with university extension activities. Based on its findings, it is pertinent to deepen reflection with a focus on USR within the hospital's internal environment, a setting where the healthcare, educational, and environmental dimensions of medical training are concretely expressed.

Traditionally, university extension has been conceived as outreach toward the external community. However, in the hospital context, it is necessary to recognize the value of the internal environment as a space for social intervention. USR is not limited to community activities; rather, it permeates daily practice within the hospital and includes relationships with patients and families, the quality of clinical communication, health education, and environmental conditions.

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Patient-centered communication constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of this approach because it enables a better understanding of the patient's experience, promotes shared decision-making, and improves therapeutic adherence. Evidence demonstrates that effective communication directly impacts the quality of care and patient experience by promoting better clinical processes and health outcomes [1,2].

In this sense, health education and health literacy acquire a central role. Patients and their families require not only access to information but also the competencies to understand, evaluate, and appropriately use it in decision-making related to their health. Health literacy constitutes a key determinant of active patient participation and patient safety [3].

The participation of patients and their families in care represents another key component of USR within the hospital. However, evidence indicates that such participation remains limited and, in many cases, passive, especially in resource-limited settings. Overcoming these limitations requires cultural, organizational, and educational changes that position the patient as an active participant in the care process [4].

The environmental dimension of the hospital setting is also a frequently underestimated aspect. Exposure to green spaces and healthy environments is associated with reduced stress, improved mental well-being, and cardiovascular health benefits, including through biological mechanisms related to inflammation and aging [5,6]. These benefits extend to patients, faculty, students, and healthcare personnel, fostering a healthier environment for learning and work. In this regard, the university hospital is conceived as a space that promotes health through its physical environment.

Institutional initiatives developed at the undergraduate level, such as environmental community work campaigns, elimination of Aedes aegypti breeding sites, and tree planting in the hospital surroundings, constitute concrete examples of integration between education, social commitment, and the environment. With an incipient beginning at the postgraduate level, these experiences extend into the hospital's internal environment and involve faculty, students, patients, and family members in both health promotion through education and disease prevention, as well as environmental stewardship.

Consequently, the university hospital is configured as a privileged setting for the implementation of university social responsibility, where healthcare, training, and the environment are integrated into a practice oriented toward comprehensive well-being.

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