

STRENGTHEN MEDICAL EDUCATION TO IMPROVE ATTENTION TO GERIATRIC HEALTH


To the Editors:

In her *MEDICC Review* article earlier this year, Ponce-Laguardia emphasized the need for integrating social and psychological support in efforts to improve quality of life (QoL) for older Cuban adults.[1] With global life expectancy on the rise, health professions education should emphasize the importance of active aging and stress appropriate preparation of future doctors on competencies related to geriatric health concerns. In the Dominican Republic, a country of 10.8 million residents with 7.5% of the total population older than 65 years, this complementary training should be widely incorporated across medical schools.

To address this learning gap in our country, we suggest that medical curricula incorporate geriatrics training through three innovative strategies. First, by creating student interest groups, even through established national medical student organizations like Organización Dominicana de Estudiantes de Medicina (ODEM) that can develop student-run activities with community elders that focus on social interactions and health education. Second, by coordinating a community rotation with primary healthcare community centers (Unidad de Atención Primaria, UNAP) so that family doctors can supervise students and facilitate direct interactions with elders to highlight geriatric health concerns and stress the important role of preventive medicine in geriatric health and QoL. Third, by revising clinical rotations to include palliative or end of life training, in order for students to learn and strengthen essential

competencies in preventive medicine, palliative care and communication skills with patients and families.

Integrating such academic community experiences into medical education can also highlight the value of the humanistic touch and more robust social and communication skills, as well as encourage students to seek community-serving opportunities and become involved in a wide range of wellness areas.

We would encourage expansion of this approach to other Latin American countries, to prepare medical students to lead community initiatives that promote adoption of healthy lifestyles and encourage social and community support for older adults. Such action can address current learning gaps about geriatric medicine in medical curricula, offer skills-based training in geriatric health concerns, and provide valuable leadership training for these future physicians as the world experiences a demographic shift towards aging populations. 

1. Ponce-Laguardia TM. Educational program for retiring persons: a community experience in Cienfuegos Province, Cuba. *MEDICC Rev* [Internet]. 2020 Jan [cited 2020 Aug 7];22(1):28–32. Available at: <https://mediccreview.org/educational-program-for-retiring-persons-a-community-experience-in-cienfuegos-province-cuba/>

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