

Students in Medicine of the National Autonomous University of Mexico practice in the Health Care Primary Services

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In 2010, the Faculty of Medicine of the National University of Mexico, through its Public Health Department, took the innovative initiative of orienting students of first and second year to practice in the Health Care Primary Services of Mexico City. From January 2011, as a part of this new curriculum proposal, 1,200 students made their practices in 16 Health Centers in the city.

This new training program was a great success among all participants and in 2012 a second cycle was planned, to allow students undertaking practical field activities in the subjects *Public Health and Community* and *Health Promotion in the life cycle*, given by the Department of Public Health and belonging to the first and second year of course.

As a result, from 2010 to 2012, 2,400 students made their practices in 16 Health Centres in Mexico City.

In the design of these subjects great importance was given to the fact that students know the characteristics of the medical care primary level and the activities that take place both in the health centers of the Federal District (GDF) and in the Family Doctor Units of the Social Security Mexican Institute (IMSS). The medical care primary level is a fundamental stage in training general practitioners, because at this level the needs for care and the health problems are clearly identified, as well as the epidemiological profiles of the population of the Federal District.

The aforementioned subjects are organized into two semesters. Community practices are implemented in the second one. The activities that students implemented in the Health Centres were:

- Characterization of the community through the use of different techniques and socio-demographic and health indicators from secondary sources.
- Assessment of community health needs, to prioritize a specific problem.
- More detailed study of the problem prioritized, starting from primary sources data, to analyze its consequences and propose possible alternative solutions.

After two years, an assessment is being made on academic expectations and the reality experienced and expressed by students who have participated in this process. So, students from each group have been asked to present a *final report* on the practice carried out on the field. In that document the students recorded the activities implemented and the obstacles met to achieve the planned goals.



The reports show that the objectives of characterizing communities and their health needs from a public health perspective were very well achieved, as well as the study of specific topics. Both students and teachers found that learning achievements far exceeded the goals of the program's first design. This favourable opinion was also expressed by the staff of the Health Centres, who had to make a daily extra effort to implement these activities.

Among the subjects studied, issues related to *Metabolic syndrome (obesity, diabetes, hypertension)* and to *violence (family, gender, etc.)* are notable for their recurrence. Other studies evaluated the *characteristics of the services* offered by the Health Centres, in terms of quality, from the viewpoint of patients.

Finally, another group studied the *management of information* in the community *on specific diseases and conditions*, such as acute respiratory infections, tuberculosis, food and medical care offered by the Health Centre.

The implementation of these academic programs of the Faculty of Medicine, Public Health Department, of UNAM, has been so successful that all participants were encouraged to learn from them and share them. All participants agreed that *this activity is necessary and worth carrying it out to sensitize the general practitioner during the training process on the importance of the work in Health Centres and in the communities.*

The students themselves said that the field practices have provided them with a wide range of knowledge, as well as the issues of the subjects, and allowed to look from a different perspective to health and disease in communities where the figure of the general practitioner is able to face and meet the population's health needs at different levels. These practices were able to sensitize students to be close to people, helping to create a culture of health promotion that includes better ways to defend life at the individual, family and community levels.

The qualitative and impact results of this initiative allow emphasize that teaching Public Health, its concepts and values can locate, enrich and broaden the horizons of the clinical practice of these doctors that the Faculty of Medicine aims to train as good general practitioners.

