

Debilidades contextuales del proceso de formación de alumnos ayudantes en la Carrera de Medicina

Contextual weaknesses in the student assistant training process

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RESUMEN: Se realizó un estudio descriptivo-transversal en instituciones docentes de ambos niveles de atención de Santiago de Cuba, desde octubre/2018 a marzo/2019, con el objetivo de determinar las fundamentales debilidades contextuales en el proceso de formación de alumnos ayudantes. Constó de 3 etapas: revisión documental, diagnóstica y validación de resultados. Se identificaron cuatro manifestaciones en la formación de los alumnos ayudantes que, desde un enfoque valorativo-causal, arrojó como debilidades fundamentales, insuficiente concepción epistemológica-metodológica para la formación axiológico-profesional, insuficiencias en el desarrollo lógico-metodológico de la interpretación didáctico-pedagógica y limitaciones didácticas en los profesores tutores del alumno ayudante clínico en el contexto comunitario.

Palabras clave: Debilidades contextuales; Alumnos ayudantes; Proceso formativo

ABSTRACT: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in educational institutions at both levels of care in Santiago de Cuba, from October 2018 to March 2019, with the aim of determining the fundamental contextual weaknesses in the training process of student assistants. It consisted of three stages: document review, diagnosis, and validation of results. Four manifestations were identified in the training of student assistants which, from an evaluative-causal approach, revealed the following fundamental weaknesses: insufficient epistemological-methodological conception for axiological-professional training, deficiencies in the logical-methodological development of didactic-pedagogical interpretation, and didactic limitations in the tutors of clinical student assistants in the community context.

Keywords: Contextual weaknesses; Student assistants; Training process

Introduction

The training process for clinical assistant students must include a gradual period of pre-professional practice, with the aim of producing graduates who, according to their assistant

profile, are capable of efficiently performing the functions learned and demonstrated at the end of their degree, in a growing professional vocation towards the related specialty, made explicit in their healthcare, teaching, and research performance, which at a higher level allows them to apply the principles of medicine as a sociobiological science, converting the content acquired during the tutelage of their teachers into solid convictions, applicable knowledge, and correct habits of professional behavior. (Ramos et al., 2020)

During training, teaching, research, and healthcare should be considered as the essence of contextual problem-solving in problematic situations that arise during the care of individuals, as a way of empowering them axiologically and professionally.

The diversity of education in the workplace, in the form of rounds, thematic health presentations, case discussions, consultations, interconsultations, clinical, epidemiological, imaging, and pathology meetings, basic working groups, morning meetings, command posts, medical shifts, and shift handovers, enriches their scientific, technical, and professional education by strengthening their professional vocation and other axiological aspects. (Hernández et al., 2020).

The leading role played by student assistants has laid the foundations for their training as future leaders of the next generation, using innovative and sustainable methods, the results of which will enable them to face new challenges.

Hence, the objective of this research is to determine the fundamental contextual weaknesses in the training process of student assistants, especially clinical assistants.

Development

The Student Assistant Movement emerged on January 10, 1962, as part of the Higher Education Reform Act in Cuba. It has its historical roots in the organization and contribution to the training of well-rounded professionals, promotes the improvement of teaching quality in our country, and is an integral part of academic life. (González & García, 2021)

It is necessary to rethink the role of the student assistant, with balanced service and educational functions that are capable of encouraging pre-professional vocation and values specific to the profile of their assistantship, which, although easy to understand, is difficult to execute during training practice, which is actually where the incipient cognitive developmental elements should be nurtured, allowing them in postgraduate studies to act as a physician in accordance with the

educational content instilled by their tutors during the exercise of their teaching assistantship. Much of this has to do with the institutional training methodology applied to achieve an empathetic approach to individuals with problems during interviews, which, while focused on the patient, should allow for diligent action in response to the health conflicts that affect them, holistically tailored to the multi-causal, family, and community environment. (Caballero, 2020)

Henríquez et al. (2022) demonstrated the systemic nature of the relationship between the different forms of teaching organization in higher education and student learning in its most natural form, and proposed a methodological approach for teacher intervention, taking into account the spatio-temporal relationship between the different forms of teaching organization and the planning of the subject matter of each of the courses in a degree program, with an emphasis on student self-preparation and consultation.

This leads us to rethink comprehensive and effective ways of overcoming the limitations of teaching assistants in caring for individuals, with a view to their well-being within their environment, as a basic part of their human development, developed through education in the workplace, which, in short, translates into the proper application of the clinical epidemiological method. This could well be achieved if the fundamental weaknesses limiting the training process, which this study aims to identify, were to be resolved.

A descriptive, observational, and prospective study was conducted in eight teaching institutions at both levels of health care, belonging to the University of Medical Sciences of Santiago de Cuba, during the 2018-2019 academic years, with the aim of determining the fundamental contextual weaknesses in the training process of student assistants, especially clinical assistants. The universe consisted of 97 student assistants who were rotating in hospital wards or clinics of the selected teaching polyclinics, where they practiced their assistantship and who met the inclusion criteria developed for this purpose, such as voluntary participation, being on rotation at the institution at the time of supervision and direct observation of the training practice, with some of the work-based learning variants selected by their tutor. An in-depth interview was conducted with each student assistant observed and their tutor on the existence or absence of weaknesses in their training process. The opinions recorded on the subject in faculty meetings, student assistant activities, and student brigade meetings at the institutions to which they belonged were also taken into account. In a second meeting, a group dynamic was carried out, where it was possible to summarize, list, and discuss the fundamental reflective aspects identified as weaknesses through

their validation in consultation with experts, made up of medical professionals with vast pedagogical experience in aspects of teaching assistance.

For better understanding, the results were presented in contingency or double-entry tables, prepared on an ASUS microcomputer running Windows 10. The texts were processed in Word and the tables in Excel, calculating the absolute and relative frequency as summary measures of qualitative variables. The provisions of the Declaration of Helsinki were respected. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the University and each of the selected institutions. All participants in the study voluntarily gave their consent to take part in the research, having been informed of its objectives and relevance, and the anonymity of their personal data was protected.

The main results of the research showed that, within the universe of 97 student assistants, there was a predominance of females, with 77 students (79%), over the male minority. (Figure 1)

Figure 1.

Gender of student assistants in the institutions studied. University of Medical Sciences of Santiago de Cuba. Academic year 2018-2019.

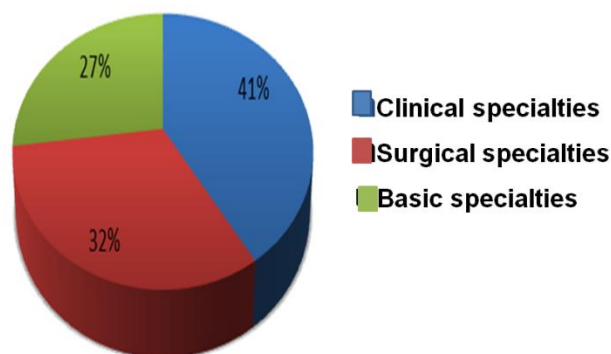


Source: Taken by the Authors

The study analyzed the specialties and determined that clinical specialties are the predominant assistants in this research, with 41%, followed by surgical specialties with 32% of the total, and the rest are basic specialties. (Figure 2)

Figure 2.

Distribution of student assistants by specialty. University of Medical Sciences of Santiago de Cuba. Academic year 2018-2019

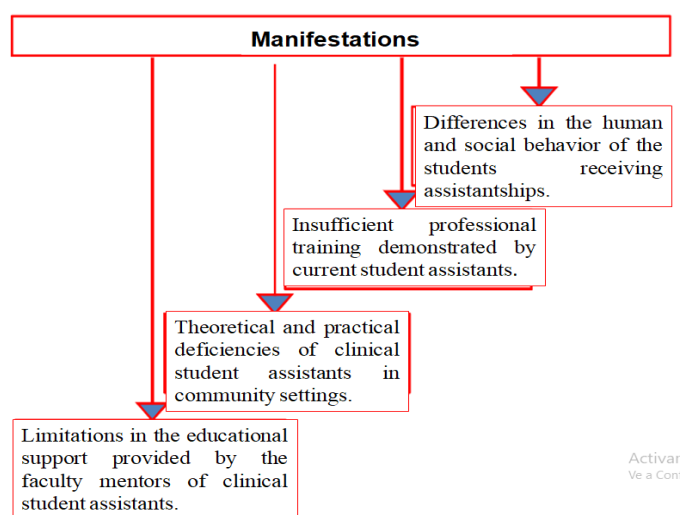


Source: Taken by the Authors

Based on the behavior resulting from the performance of student assistants, especially clinical assistants, four fundamental manifestations could be identified in their training process, given deficiencies in the human and social behavior of the students who are granted assistantships, shortcomings in the pre-professional training of current student assistants, theoretical and practical deficiencies of clinical student assistants in the community context, and limitations in the educational attention provided by the tutors of clinical student assistants.

(Figure 3)

Challenges encountered in the training process for student assistants. University of Medical Sciences of Santiago de Cuba. Academic year 2018-2019



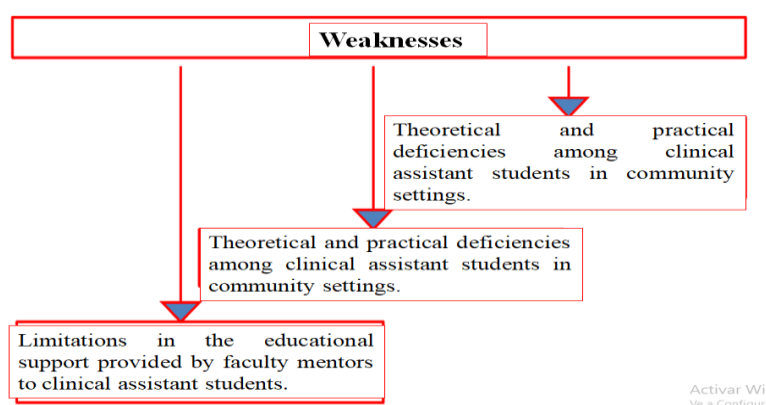
Source: Taken by the Authors

Upon conducting a scientific analysis of the statements found regarding the axiological-professional training process with a causal approach, from the perspective of experienced

professionals, we found (Figure 4) that there were three fundamental weaknesses, namely: insufficient epistemological and methodological conception for the axiological-professional training of clinical assistant students, shortcomings in the logical-methodological development of the didactic-pedagogical interpretation of the axiological-professional training of clinical assistant students in the community context, and didactic limitations among the teachers who tutor clinical assistant students in the community context.

Figure 4

Fundamental weaknesses identified from a causal approach. University of Medical Sciences of Santiago de Cuba. Academic year 2018-2019



Source: Taken by the Authors

In the community context, there are increased opportunities for student assistants to develop their pre-professional skills. Teaching them to integrate teaching, care, and research processes from diverse contexts related to their assistantship allows them to design monthly work plans focused on establishing priorities, taking into account contextual peculiarities. Therefore, independently, under faculty supervision, upon completing their assistantship, these students should be able to apply the medical profession's working method, summarized in the clinical method, at a higher level than the rest of the student body.

The current development of scientific research is a process that supports human development through the investigation of human beings in solving problems that affect their phylogenetic development. It requires profound knowledge that guarantees the validity of scientific

discoveries, based on the transformative capacity of human beings as a connotation of the essential nature of scientific research. (Palomero, Cáceres, & Torrego, 2024)

In this regard, del Cerro et al. (2021) attach great importance to the training process of Cuban university students, considering it to be continuous and aimed at achieving higher levels of professional training and producing increasingly competent university graduates who are committed to the development of their country, in line with social needs, emphasizing as fundamental the formation of moral values in general and, in particular, responsibility and humanism, for their full identification with the health problems of their community, country, and the world, with a complete willingness to offer their services and scientific knowledge wherever and whenever requested.

We fully agree that such a challenge can only be taken on and fulfilled by people with relevant moral qualities, that it cannot be the work of spontaneity, and that it is necessary to insert these students, in our case the student assistant, into an educational context characterized by academic, professional, and research excellence.

The reality of scientific research currently undermines the traditionalist character that has been carried out in the medical sciences and calls for the promotion of educational transformations that redefine a critical and committed professional awareness from the undergraduate level, with a multidimensional scientific research approach (Piñera & Saborit, 2022).

Medical science teaching assistants are required to develop the ability to articulate pre-professional medical practices, which are directed towards the search for educational alternatives that guarantee a correspondence between their practical medical work and the human vocational connotation of their educational process, which imposes new paths on them as professionals in their future social mission. The years of study of these students, through different specialties, with a community focus, allow them to acquire important values, habits, and attitudes related to the practice of professional values, enabling them to perform at any level of care in the health sector, even before graduation. (Caballero, 2020)

All of this is only possible because Cuban medical universities are increasingly emphasizing a scientific and technical approach to teaching, establishing commitments with all sectors of society and actively interrelating students' work in different sociocultural and community contexts.

The training of student assistants is one of the problems that frequently arises in most Cuban universities and also universally, although with other names specific to their socioeconomic contexts. These training problems have a significant impact on scientific research, both in the Cuban and foreign medical education systems, which is not limited to health, hospital, or community teaching institutions, but also affects universities and institutions that teach non-medical sciences around the world, which goes against the number of students who wish to pursue specialties related to their assistantship in their postgraduate studies.

In the training of clinical assistant students, the social relevance of study plans and programs is becoming increasingly important, which is why they must be geared towards achieving a comprehensive education, where aspects of promotion and prevention, as well as psychosocial and ecological aspects, also count. This involves fostering scientific research motivation in the real settings of the services, participating in healthcare processes within the context of the healthcare institution. This means redirecting general training methods and focusing on active learning through constant contact with the reality of healthcare, the search for information, and epistemological gaps, which allow students to construct their own frames of reference and acquire the ability to learn on their own throughout their professional lives.

The scientific research and professional shortcomings commonly found in most of the student assistants at the universities selected as a sample could be eliminated if a training strategy were developed and applied, emphasizing the basic principles of the functions of future health professionals in the areas of healthcare directly related to the object of teaching work, where they are introduced to the didactic training process and to teaching and research roles, enabling them to seek solutions to problems in their performance as student assistants and other managerial and special functions in exceptional conditions, such as disasters, epidemiological campaigns, in short, a training tool where these students learn by doing and reinforce what they have learned by teaching and researching to solve problems that hinder their pre-professional functions. (Piñera & Saborit, 2022)

In the search for problems affecting the training of student assistants during the implementation of new curricula aimed at abolishing medical education by cycles and achieving a single continuous cycle over the six years of the degree program, solutions can be found that, with confidence, independence, and a great deal of effort, will allow professors in basic specialties to strengthen their scientific research training role, both in the community and in hospitals, and to

produce student assistants capable of earning the space they deserve within the teaching-educational process of the Cuban Medical University, with a solid basic training in the sphere of professional scientific research. (Vera et al., 2021)

According to the author, a humanistic professional ethical interpretation with guiding requirements is necessary to govern the training process of student assistants, for the empowerment required of the medical vocation during the exercise of assistantship, conceived from a pedagogical-research training approach of a pre-professional exercise, which re-signifies the vocational intentionality of the ontological scope of the training process.

Studies carried out in university medical institutions in the province of Santiago de Cuba reveal training deficiencies in these student assistants.

This could be a scientific expression of the initial epistemic contradiction between the training specificity of pre-professional medical practice and the generalization of the axiological of the clinical student assistant, whose main intellectual position is ethical medical behavior in its dialectical relationship with axiology, which is capable of offering ethical reflection in the course of principles guided by responsibility and autonomy. (del Cerro et al., 2021)

The performance of these students' professional research practice sometimes lacks the necessary humanistic sense that should have been intentionally instilled in them by the tutors and professors of the institutions that trained them throughout their careers.

This process does not go beyond axiological rationality towards research when this future medical professional does not develop the theoretical aspects and ethical practice based on scientific responsibility and the autonomy developed in their pre-professional practice, as an integrative synthesis of the scientific research component. (George et al., 2020)

Conclusions

The axiological-professional training process is a motivating force for the scientific research development of the student assistant, where they integrate the human aspect into their professional vocation. It is an obligatory goal of our universities to ensure that student assistants complete their assistantship, practicing appropriate pre-professional training in any of the scenarios, demonstrating the acquisition of educational and research content with the humanistic ethics that should govern the actions of health professionals.

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