

Extension experience during the COVID-19 pandemic: reports and perceptions on the student performance in Primary Health Care

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ABSTRACT

University extension as a link between teaching and community action is in line with the current model of teaching students in the health area, breaking the previous concept centered on the professor and transmission of knowledge. The practical experience provided by extension transforms the student, previously passive, into an active agent in the process of learning and building experiences and social thinking. The extension project “Prevenção, cuidados e enfrentamento à pandemia do novo coronavírus na região metropolitana de Curitiba” (*Prevention, care and coping with the new coronavirus pandemics in the metropolitan region of Curitiba*) had participation of five extension students. Conducted during the second semester of 2020, it allowed the students to practice in the primary health care of SUS and the approach to more than 1,800 patients, both remotely, by acting in the Call Center of the Municipal Health Secretariat (SMS) of Curitiba, or in person, by participating in the event “Saúde na Estrada” (*Health on the Road*), a partnership between universities, police forces and SMS from Curitiba. This report aims to describe the actions performed by students during their practice in the primary health care in the university extension, as well as the contributions that such academic practice provided in professional and humanized training.

Descriptors: Community-Institutional Relations. Education. Public Health Professional. Unified Health System. COVID-19. Primary Health Care.

1 INTRODUCTION

The model traditionally adopted for health education, especially in secular Brazilian universities, is still centered on the transmission of content – often in a disconnected manner between its thematic cores – and on the centralization of teaching in the textbook, professor and classroom, often separating the teaching, research and extension. In this sense, construction of the student's experience with practice and contact with the reality of Brazilian healthcare is often left behind, leading to undermined interprofessional and interdisciplinary relationships¹.

The practice of university extension allows, as a complementary alternative to the current model, the insertion of practical experiences for the extension student. More precisely, thinking within the scope of the Unified Health System (SUS), several experiences have shown a positive reinforcement in its action, both by professors and students²⁻⁴. Even within the national curriculum guidelines, supervised internships in SUS spaces had already demonstrated that the insertion of students in the practical field, experiencing direct contact with the patients and their several realities, concerns, anxieties and social contexts, has the transforming potential of training humanized and reflective professionals concerned with improving the population access to health⁵⁻⁹.

This experience report aims to describe the activities performed during the Extension Project "Prevention, care and coping with the new coronavirus pandemic in the metropolitan region of Curitiba" of the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), focusing on its actions in the scope of primary healthcare during the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

2 EXPERIENCE REPORT

The extension project "Prevention, care and coping with the new coronavirus pandemic in the metropolitan region of Curitiba" was initiated in June 2020 as an extension proposal in the action to fight the pandemic, integrating the institutional response of the university in coping with the Covid-19. During the six months of work, several actions were performed in the areas of primary care and health promotion, both in different scenarios of practical activities and in scientific production.

The project had participation of two professors, one adjunct and one substitute, from the Department of Public Health and five students from the Medicine and Dentistry courses at UFPR. This work was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Hospital do Trabalhador/SES/PR (CAAE: 32121120.3.3003.5225).

The activities developed by students consisted of three main cores: practical actions of experience in health promotion; theoretical-formative actions; and scientific production actions.

Practical actions of experience in health promotion

Two main actions brought the students closer to the reality of primary healthcare during the pandemic: volunteering at the Covid-19 Call Center of the Municipal Health Secretariat of Curitiba (Curitiba SMS) and the event "Saúde na Estrada" (*Health on the Road*).

Work in the call center lasted from June to October 2020 and consisted of weekly four-hour shifts, during which the participating extension students answered common questions from the population about the

SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus and the Covid-19 disease. They also provided guidance to the symptomatic population who sought tele-assistance, helped to clarify the search for in-person medical care according to the regionalization of Basic Health Units (UBS) of Curitiba and Emergency Care Units (UPA) and the regions where the patients lived, scheduled RT-PCR testing for SARS-CoV-2 when needed, and followed up confirmed Covid-19 cases by patient calls.

During these five months, 990 people were assisted by extension students. The project students worked both with other volunteer students from the Call Center and with members of the primary healthcare team from Curitiba, such as family and community doctors, nurses, social workers, community health agents and health managers. The contact with different professionals allowed contact with the interdisciplinary nature of healthcare, helping to build an understanding of the integrality of SUS network in its means of action and care delivery. Also, it allowed the students to approach real problems, though remotely, presented by the population that sought the telehealth tool, by the diversity of stories, contexts and outcomes presented during follow-up, encouraging the search for individualized solutions even in the midst of action protocols recommended in the fight against the pandemic in Curitiba.

Finally, though representing an essentially practical activity, the work in the Call Center required constant updating of scientific literature, aiming to assure population guidance always based on evidence and with periodic updates on the management and care protocols according to the frequent changes in the epidemiological scenario. In the pandemic context, teleservice emerged as an essential healthcare tool. The

opportunity to participate in remote care during the academic training period was beneficial not only from the standpoint of health care, by contributing to the care of users, but also added the acquisition of practical skills in light technologies, multidisciplinary and experience with the use of telehealth tools by the students¹⁰.

Other practical action experienced by the participants was the event "Health on the Road", held in Curitiba and metropolitan region, with support of Curitiba SMS, Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), State University of Ponta Grossa (UEPG), UniBrasil, Federal Highway Police (PRF) and Paraná State Military Police (PMPR). The itinerant program offered primary healthcare to the road population by screening measures – such as blood pressure measurement and capillary blood glucose measurement – and guidance on disease prevention and health promotion. The students participated in two days of program action, one in Campina Grande do Sul (PR) and another in São José dos Pinhais (PR), during which they conducted awareness activities about the Covid-19 prevention, besides screening drivers who were symptomatic, totaling 820 calls provided by extension workers.

"Health on the Road" allowed the approach to a population often neglected due to the difficulty of longitudinal follow-up in primary healthcare, allowing to observe the reality in which they live and the perception of this population regarding the pandemic and its impact on these workers.

Theoretical-formative actions

The Extension Project was fully developed during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and part of it occurred during suspension of the academic calendar of the university.

Thus, the participation in online scientific events helped, to some extent, to maintain contact with theoretical-formative activities in the health area. Extension students participated in several events for scientific promotion and dissemination, such as Congresses, Academic Conferences/Weeks and Scientific Symposia. All activities were supported by monthly meetings, with knowledge sharing, discussion and re-planning of actions in different practice scenarios.

Scientific production actions

Considering the range of action of the Extension project "Prevention, care and coping with the new coronavirus pandemic in the metropolitan region of Curitiba", the scientific production could encompass several fields, either focusing on the production of scientific literature on the perceptions of practical actions, or on those focused on theoretical training regarding the pandemic and health training.

Following the first axis mentioned, five works were produced from material collected during the interdisciplinary experience of students in the "Health on the Road" project, as well as a paper reporting the work process in the voluntary action in the Covid-19 Call Center of the Curitiba SMS¹⁰.

In the focus of productions based on theoretical training in Covid-19 and its coping, another five papers were produced, including abstracts on health training in the fields of Dentistry, Mental Health and Medicine during the pandemic. All activities performed in the project encouraged the extension-research integration, aiming at recording this moment of emergency in public health and coping with Covid-19. Thus, Medicine and Dentistry students experienced

this during their work in the pandemic, a situation that allows expanded discussions and interdisciplinary and collaborative work.

3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The extension project "Prevention, care and coping with the new coronavirus pandemic in the metropolitan region of Curitiba" allowed the expansion of health training by taking the participating extension students to SUS primary care fields, such as the Covid-19 Call Center of Curitiba SMS, the events "Health on the Road", and enabled an integral vision of health care and promotion.

In the patients' speeches on the telephone service or during the reception of road workers, the approach to the population allowed a glimpse of different realities and life stories, bringing a reflection of individualized and personalized care according to the patient and not according to the disease. In this regard, there is a clear gap between the disease-centered teaching model usually learned in the classroom and the reality in which each attendance is inserted^{1,3,10}.

Besides the relationship with users, interdisciplinarity by contact with professionals from different health specialties was present as an addition to the university experience usually limited by the disconnection between courses². In this sense, the extension allowed relationships between students from different courses, such as the dentistry and medicine students in this project, sharing of common purposes, such as scientific production and healthcare for the population during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition to the interpersonal relationships experienced, the practical experience with elements of the SUS care network was a significant addition to academic health training, by providing a better

understanding of the decentralizing logic of the Brazilian public health system and its management according to levels of care and complexity.

Finally, it is clear that not only the technical-professional growth is reinforced by practical extension experiences, but also the feeling of belonging and valuing public health for the country as instruments of citizenship effectiveness, a feeling shared in other experience initiatives with the SUS throughout Brazil^{2,11}.

RESUMO

Experiência extensionista durante a pandemia de COVID-19: relatos e percepções sobre a atuação discente na Atenção Primária à Saúde

A extensão universitária como elo entre o ensino e a ação comunitária vem de encontro ao modelo atual de ensino ao estudante da área da saúde, rompendo com aquele antes centralizado no docente e na transmissão do conhecimento. A experiência prática proporcionada pela extensão transforma o estudante, antes passivo, em agente ativo no processo de aprendizagem e construção de experiências e de um pensamento social. O projeto de extensão “Prevenção, cuidados e enfrentamento à pandemia do novo coronavírus na região metropolitana de Curitiba” contou com a participação de cinco extensionistas. Realizado no segundo semestre de 2020, permitiu aos discentes a prática na atenção primária à saúde da rede do SUS e a aproximação com mais de 1800 pacientes, tanto remotamente, através da atuação em *Call Center* da SMS de Curitiba, quanto presencialmente, com o evento “Saúde na Estrada”, parceria entre universidades, forças policiais e a SMS de Curitiba. Este relato objetiva descrever as ações realizadas pelos extensionistas durante suas atuações na atenção primária à saúde através da extensão universitária, bem como as contribuições que

tal prática acadêmica possibilitou na formação profissional e humanizada dos discentes.

Descritores: Relações Comunidade-Instituição. Educação Profissional em Saúde Pública. Sistema Único de Saúde. COVID-19. Atenção Primária à Saúde.

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