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Letter to the Editor

The Impact of the MadAlegria Project on Humanized Training and the Development of Empathy among Alumni

O Impacto do Projeto MadAlegria na Formação Humanizada e no Desenvolvimento de Empatia de Egressos

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Humanização; Comportamento; Educação médica; Voluntariado; Empatia.

Dear Editor,

In recent decades, the remarkable scientific and technological progress in healthcare has been accompanied by a marked distancing in interpersonal relationships within care settings. This scenario contrasts with the definition of health proposed by the World Health Organization — as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity[1] — and with the principles of Brazil's National Humanization Policy (Política Nacional de Humanização, PNH) within the Unified Health System, which recognizes the centrality of the individual in all dimensions of care[2].

In Brazil, the concept of health was further expanded in 1990, when it was established as a fundamental human right under the Law 8.080/1990[3]. In 2003, the National Humanization Policy was created to value all subjects involved in the care process — including users, professionals, and managers — guided by principles such as transversality, inseparability between care and management, and autonomy, co-responsibility, and protagonism of individuals and collectives[2,4]. Humanization is therefore an essential component of both clinical practice and the education of healthcare professionals. In the training of such professionals, the development of competencies such as empathy, active listening, and receptiveness is fundamental to ensuring patient-centered care[5–7]. However, the growing gap between technical-scientific advancement and the quality of human interactions in healthcare underscores the need for educational strategies focused on humanized training[8–12].

Within this context, the MadAlegria Project was created to foster humanized practices in both learning and professional behavior. Established in 2011 by students and faculty members at the University of São Paulo (USP), MadAlegria

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is a Culture and University Extension Project aimed at promoting humanization in healthcare education—particularly at the undergraduate level—and at improving the hospital environment, making it more welcoming for patients, families, and healthcare staff. Since 2012, the project has incorporated two artistic and playful languages: hospital clowning and storytelling. These approaches are used as pedagogical tools to enhance relational competencies such as empathy, active listening, teamwork, and sensitivity to others' experiences[13–15].

To systematically assess the impact of MadAlegria on humanized training and empathy development among alumni, we conducted a prospective, observational, mixed-methods study involving former participants trained between 2011 and 2023. Data collection was performed through the REDCap® platform[16,17] and included sociodemographic, professional, and behavioral dimensions, with empathy-related items derived from the Jefferson Scale of Empathy, validated for Brazilian Portuguese[18,19].

In summary, the findings revealed that participation in MadAlegria had a positive and lasting influence on the personal and professional development of former volunteers. The project broadened participants' perspectives on person-centered care, a skill that is essential to the education of health professionals and other fields alike, aligning with pedagogical practices that place the human being at the center of decision-making[20-23].

Integrating university extension programs that promote humanization, such as MadAlegria, into the curriculum may represent an effective strategy for developing professionals who are more ethical, sensitive, and committed to the comprehensiveness of care. Future research should explore quantitative and comparative methodologies, with control groups and longitudinal follow-up, to more robustly measure the impact of such initiatives on professional training and workplace environments.

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