The teaching of Psychiatry at Santa Marcelina Medical School: A methodological approach to engage the students

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Objectives:

The objective of this study is to present a methodological approach to teaching the Psychiatry discipline at Santa Marcelina Medical School (FASM) to stimulate the knowledge in Mental Health.

Background:

Founded by The Congregation Sisters of Santa Marcelina in 1927, Santa Marcelina College began its history offering Art Education, Fashion and Music courses.¹ In 2012, it established its medical school. With the aim of preparing compassionate, committed, and globalized physicians, knowledgeable about the innovation and scientific evidence, this course admits 170 MD students every year.² Its training campuses are Santa Marcelina Hospital and Santa Marcelina Itaim Paulista Hospital, both situated in poor neighborhoods in the city of São Paulo. The first one is the biggest hospital in the East side of the city, with 706 beds to deliver service to a population of approximately 2,500,000 inhabitants. The second one, a general hospital which provides 25 beds to psychiatry exclusively and a primary health care network to the region.³

Materials and Methods:

Evaluation of FASM medical course curriculum and the teaching programs of theoretical and clinical disciplines related to psychiatry.

Results:

The medical course has a modular structure that covers disciplines and areas required for completing medical training. The Mental Health module has a total workload and work hours of 338 hours, divided into the following disciplines: Medical Psychology (60 hours), Psychiatry (180 hours) and Internship in Mental Health (98 hours). This study focused on Psychiatry, a discipline which objective is to deepen the propedeutics in mental health with emphasis on expanded anamnesis, mental status examination and its alterations, with the purpose of constructing clinical reasoning that links these findings to psychiatric syndromes and diagnoses, integrating the basic cycle knowledge with the clinical one. It also involves historical aspects of psychiatry, associating it with other fields of knowledge, such as public mental health policies, diagnosis of major mental disorders, taking into account epidemiological aspects, pathogenesis, as well as clinical characteristics and their treatments. Issues related to psychiatric emergencies, human sexuality, substance use and abuse are also discussed, giving special attention to general practitioner needs. In the Psychiatry discipline, methodological approaches, covering clinical case study, journal article readings and films are used to improve the students' reasoning and engage them in Mental Health studies. These activities are followed by lectures on the topics addressed and taught by the teachers. It is important to mention that the Internship in Mental Health at FASM has an eminently practical approach with training camps at the hospital level and primary care at the Psychosocial Attention Center. The objective of the internship activities is to train general practitioners with a good knowledge of psychiatry. Some activities are carried out in conjunction with the psychiatry trainee program, such as the discussion of clinical cases and scientific articles. Others are conducted exclusively with interns in which they evaluate inpatients, outpatients, make home visits, and discuss theoretical and practical aspects with internship preceptors.

Discussion and Conclusions:

Questions concerning the teaching of psychiatry in undergraduate medical school have been present for a long time. In 1945, a study evaluated teaching at Yale University School of Medicine, discussing theoretical and practical aspects of the teaching method, highlighting the need for both aspects in good medical education.⁴ Many authors address the need for discussion of more practical issues and the daily lives of general practitioners without having to go deeper into more relevant points to the specialist doctor.⁵⁻⁷ Medical teaching model in Brazil has undergone changes in recent years but there is still a lot of resistance to more active teaching methodologies.⁸ With the increasing perception of the importance of Psychiatry in daily routines of general practitioners, it was possible to conclude that the methodological approach proposed to the psychiatry discipline at FASM has been achieving its objectives towards the integral formation of the student. The use of this approach, focusing on practice and on clinical reasoning, pointed out a decrease in prejudice related to psychiatry and mental disorders, engaging and stimulating the students to deepen their knowledge in Mental Health.

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