



Medicine

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Building the Community at Católica Medical School

Medicine is, at its very core, a vocation centred on community. Every professional involved in healthcare – whether in direct patient contact or in ensuring that the healthcare system functions effectively – ultimately works for the benefit of both the individual patient and the wider community.

Communitarian philosophy is so deeply ingrained in medicine that the very *modus operandi* of healthcare is inherently collaborative. Diagnosis, management decisions, and patient follow-up are carried out by multidisciplinary teams, in which professionals with diverse expertise combine their knowledge for the maximum benefit of the patient. This collaborative approach has become the gold standard in patient care. Healthcare, therefore, must be delivered by communities of professionals rather than by isolated individuals.

It is essential that this culture of collaboration is fostered from the very beginning of medical training. At Católica Medical School, the entire educational philosophy is designed to cultivate a medical community that works for the benefit of society as a whole. This begins with the teaching methodology itself: Problem-Based Learning. This approach encourages students to work in teams, with each member contributing their knowledge, experiences, and findings in order to solve the problem presented. In this way, knowledge and competencies are developed beyond individual capacity and effort. The collective contributes to each individual's growth, allowing students to experience firsthand the added value of teamwork and shared learning.

Building on this communitarian foundation, medical education must

extend beyond the classroom and engage with the broader social and professional communities. Community is not only something future physicians serve; it is something they must actively belong to, understand, and help sustain. Through communitarian activities, interprofessional collaboration, particularly with the school of nursing, participation in healthcare promotion and screening programs, medical students are progressively integrated into a living healthcare ecosystem, learning to practice medicine *with* the community rather than merely *for* it.

Communitarian activities within medical education provide a crucial bridge between theoretical knowledge and lived social reality. By engaging with local communities through outreach initiatives, service-learning projects, and public health interventions, students meet the social determinants of health firsthand. This moves students away from a purely disease-centred model of care toward a more holistic, person-centred approach. Community-based activities reinforce the idea that effective healthcare emerges from partnership rather than unilateral action.

Early collaboration between medical and nursing students fosters mutual respect, breaks down professional barriers, and cultivates a shared language of care. When students learn together, they gain a deeper understanding of each profession's unique contributions and responsibilities, as well as the importance of collaborative decision-making. This mirrors real-world healthcare settings, where effective patient care depends on seamless cooperation among diverse professionals.

Healthcare promotion and screening programmes offer particularly powerful opportunities for communitarian learning. These programmes emphasize prevention, early detection, and population-level impact. Through direct involvement, students come to understand that medicine is not solely about treating disease but also about preventing illness and promoting well-being. Moreover, these activities highlight the ethical responsibility of the medical profession to reduce health disparities and to reach vulnerable or underserved populations.

Crucially, these communitarian experiences contribute to the development of professional identity. Medical students do not become physicians solely by acquiring knowledge and technical skills; they become physicians by internalizing the values, responsibilities, and ethical commitments of the profession. Working within communities, alongside other healthcare professionals, and in service of public health

allows students to see themselves as members of a collective with a shared mission. This sense of belonging counteracts the individualism and competitiveness that can sometimes characterize medical training and replaces it with solidarity, shared purpose, and mutual support.

The institutional role in fostering this culture cannot be overstated. When medical schools intentionally design curricula that prioritize community engagement, interprofessional collaboration, and service, they send a clear message about what it means to be a doctor. At Católica Medical School, the emphasis on Problem-Based Learning, teamwork, and community-oriented activities reflects a coherent educational philosophy: medicine is learned and practiced within communities. Students are encouraged not only to excel individually but also to contribute to the learning and well-being of others. In doing so, the school itself becomes a microcosm of the healthcare system it seeks to serve – a community dedicated to the common good.

Furthermore, communitarian education has implications for physician well-being and resilience. A strong sense of community has been shown to mitigate burnout, enhance professional satisfaction, and promote reflective practice. When students learn to rely on their peers, to collaborate across disciplines, and to engage meaningfully with patients and communities, they develop support networks that endure beyond training. These networks are essential in a profession that often deals with high emotional and ethical demands. Community, therefore, is not only a means of improving patient care but also a protective factor for healthcare professionals themselves.

Community is not an abstract ideal in medicine; it is a practical, lived reality that must be cultivated intentionally throughout medical education. Communitarian philosophy underpins the organization of healthcare, the delivery of patient care, and the formation of professional identity. Through communitarian activities, collaboration with nursing schools, and participation in healthcare promotion and screening programmes, medical students learn to be part of a community, to serve a community, and to grow within a community. These experiences shape physicians who are not only clinically competent but also socially responsible, collaborative, and deeply attuned to the needs of the populations they serve. In reaffirming community as a central value, medical education lays the foundation for a more humane, effective, and sustainable healthcare system.