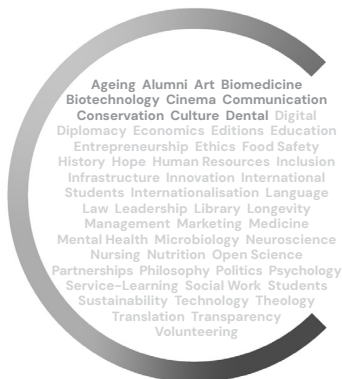




Dental

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Beyond the Clinic Walls: A Mosaic of Smiles and Science

The morning air in Viseu carries a certain stillness, but inside the labs of the Faculty of Dental Medicine at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa (FMD-UCP), there is a palpable sense of urgency. For those of us within these walls, the university has never been just a place of lectures and exams; it is a bridge between scientific knowledge and the pressing needs of Viseu region. As we look toward the *T4EU Week 2026*, themed “Community. Communities”, we are reminded that our role is to empower these very groups, transforming lives through a shared journey of health and solidarity.

The Lab That Went to the Field

I remember the peak of the pandemic – a time of silence and isolation. At CIIS (Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Health), the challenge was clear: how do we keep our community safe? We responded to a call by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) in March of 2020 for solutions, and by May, our team was deep into developing the first saliva-based diagnostic test for COVID-19 in Portugal.

Imagine the relief of a young athlete or a student who, instead of the dreaded invasive swab, could provide a simple saliva sample. It was non-invasive and didn't require the scarce medical staff of the time for collection. We developed a methodology that allowed us to test up to 20 people with a single test, drastically reducing costs. This wasn't just ‘research’; it was the reason thousands of young people could keep playing sports and attending classes. When our work eventually helped shape national health policies through the DGS (Direção Geral de Saúde),

we realised the true power of being “knowledge entrepreneurs” – turning a lab breakthrough into a societal lifeline.

Lessons You Can’t Learn in a Textbook

Step away from the high-tech diagnostic tools, and you might find our students in a local primary school, a nursing home or a social support centre. Through projects like Educar a Escovar or Sorrisos Maiores, the classroom or the nursing home expands to include the entire city.

A dental student, perhaps nervous about his or her first community outreach, sits down with a child or an elderly resident at the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Viseu. In that moment, the technicalities of periodontology or endodontics take a back seat to human connection. The student isn’t just checking teeth; they are encountering the reality of health inequalities. They learn to listen, to empathise, and to respect the diverse contexts of those they serve.

This is where the transformation happens. As these students collaborate with partners like Cáritas Diocesana de Viseu or the Ordem Soberana e Militar de Malta, they evolve from clinicians into agents of positive change. They understand that a “better community” is built one smile at a time, through projects that span all ages – from *Ser Criança* to *Sorrisos em Movimento*.

The Digital Horizon and the T4EU Vision

Our mission at FMD-UCP is anchored in three pillars: Teaching, Research, and Social Responsibility. However, as we look to the future, these pillars are being reinforced by the digital revolution. The inauguration of the Centre for Digital Teaching in Dental Medicine (CED-MeD) in 2023 marks a new chapter where innovation meets tradition.

The upcoming *T4EU Week* in May 2026 will be the culmination of this spirit. It is an invitation to join our “Community of Communities” – environmental, digital, and societal. We are moving toward a model where active methodologies and digital tools allow us to generate an even deeper, more lasting impact.

At the end, the university is not an ivory tower. It is a living organism that thrives when it breathes the same air as its neighbours. Whether we are validating a new diagnostic test or teaching a child how to brush their teeth, we are fulfilling a promise: to be present, to empower, and to build a better common life together.