

# Letter to the Editor

## The role of academic associations in professional training

O papel das ligas acadêmicas na formação profissional

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### To the Editor:

The training of future health professionals should be aimed at the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, and practices that will enable them to promote health, prevent diseases, and address the most prevalent conditions in their country. The Brazilian National Curriculum Guidelines for healthcare courses, published in late 2001, recommend that “the most common health care needs be at the core of the curriculum development” and suggest that methodologies that favor the integration of teaching, research, outreach, and health care be used in order to foster attitudes toward citizenship.<sup>(1,2)</sup> In order to achieve these goals, the curricula should provide different teaching-learning scenarios, facilitate active interaction with users and health professionals at the outset of the training program, and integrate the social needs of health care into academic training, with an emphasis on the *Sistema Único de Saúde* (SUS, Brazilian Unified Health Care System). Teaching activities that stimulate creativity, as well as initiative for self-learning and critical thinking, prepare future professionals for the constant changes and advances in knowledge in the modern world, which require critical analysis in decision-making regarding whether or not to implement ever-increasing technological innovations into their practices. The classical professor-centered model no longer meets the needs of the new society.

In this scenario, there have been an increasing number of alternative ways of stimulating and sharing professional experiences even during the training program. Academic associations represent one such alternative. They are student organizations whose activities are undertaken in conjunction with professors, researchers, and professionals working within the SUS, at the initiative of students themselves, who are interested in exploring or increasing their knowledge of a given theme.

Academic associations can have different formats and statutes. However, in 2006, the

Executive Board of the Brazilian National Medical Student Association released a booklet containing guidelines for establishing medical academic associations and for developing statutes for such associations.<sup>(3)</sup> Although the booklet can be used as a guide in the process of founding academic associations, the guidelines provided are not aimed at standardizing such associations. The Executive Board of the Brazilian National Medical Student Association understands that each school of medicine has its own particularities. Academic association activities are based on the triad of teaching, research, and outreach. Teaching activities include lectures, clinical case discussion, seminars, mini-courses, and practical activities, including the follow-up of outpatients and of patients being treated at other facilities. Health promotion activities, which are usually neglected in the curricula, are one of the most important academic association activities. Health campaigns can be developed in conjunction with nongovernmental organizations and community centers. This interaction, together with day-to-day practice, can aid students in choosing their future specialty. The reported experiences are quite diverse. In some medical schools, academic association councils have emerged; these are organizations that are often linked to academic centers and that aim at organizing and coordinating the various academic association activities, as well as at evaluating proposals for new associations.<sup>(3)</sup>

In the past decade, the number of academic associations in the medical schools in Brazil has increased, as has the impact of such associations. The Brazilian Society of Medical Academic Associations was created during the VIII Brazilian Clinical Medicine Conference, held in the city of Gramado, Brazil, in 2005.<sup>(4)</sup> More recently, various medical specialty societies have provided support for the development of academic associations, making room for the dissemination of information on such associations on their homepages. In April of 2012, the Rio de Janeiro Regional Council

of Medicine organized a meeting of academic associations in the state in order to increase their visibility and to stimulate the creation of new academic associations.

On the Internet, there are records of academic associations for various medical specialties or diseases. Among those of interest to the readers of the Brazilian Journal of Pulmonology are the Academic Associations of Pulmonology, Infectious Diseases, and Pediatrics, as well as the *Liga Científica de Tuberculose do Rio de Janeiro* (LCT-RJ, Rio de Janeiro Tuberculosis Scientific League). Such associations are generally linked to a single institution, although some are inter-institutional; some are linked to a single department (nearly always a medical department), whereas others, such as the LCT-RJ, are multidisciplinary.

Our experience began in March of 2001,<sup>(5)</sup> when the LCT-RJ was founded by students and faculty members of the Gama Filho University School of Medicine with the objectives of contributing to tuberculosis control through activities aimed at increasing the visibility of the disease; increasing medical student knowledge; doing research, under the guidance of faculty members, on issues affecting the state; and raising the awareness of health administrators, faculty members, health professionals, and civil society to the serious problem of tuberculosis. Students from other departments and educational institutions soon joined the LCT-RJ, approximately 300 undergraduate students having joined the LCT-RJ since its creation.

For recruiting new members, the LCT-RJ holds a biennial awareness-raising symposium, during which health administrators, professionals working within the SUS, and researchers address the importance of the LCT-RJ and senior students present their papers and share their experiences. Since 2001, six symposia have been held, and there has been an increasing participation of students from different institutions: the 2010 symposium had 250 participants. After selection during the symposia, students attend lectures on epidemiological, clinical, and operational aspects of the disease. In one decade, 82 students have received young investigator grants; 98 abstracts have been presented at 22 national events and at 16 international events; and 15 articles have been published in indexed journals. As a means of disseminating information, a blog was created ([lctrj.multiply.com/](http://lctrj.multiply.com/)).

In addition to contributing to the civic education of health professionals, the

multiplication of such initiatives can promote interdisciplinarity and stimulate interest in research and specialization, as well as contributing to continuing education, as recommended in the Brazilian National Curriculum Guidelines.

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