

RESUMO - COMPROMISSO SOCIAL DO MÉDICO CATÓLICO

RESTORING HUMAN DIGNITY THROUGH FAITH-BASED HUMANITARIAN MISSIONS: AN EXPERIENCE REPORT OF THE MEDCAL INITIATIVE

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Introduction: The integral approach to patient care requires addressing both physical and spiritual needs, recognizing them as intrinsically linked and inseparable. Despite its recognized importance, the medical education system offers limited opportunities for students to practice truly integral care and lacks the practical environment needed to do so - especially concerning the open discussion of faith, moral convictions, and multidisciplinary integration. Objective: This experience report describes the implementation and impact of humanitarian missions by MedCAI, a student-led Catholic medical initiative, emphasizing the restoration of human dignity in underserved populations, as well as the value of these missions in shaping the ethical and clinical training of future physicians. Methods: Under the coordination of medical students and the direct supervision of staff physicians, a multidisciplinary team comprising 60 to 100 missionaries—including healthcare professionals, students, and priests—carried out weekend-long humanitarian missions. The approach involved intensive immersion in a vulnerable population, where they shared lodging, meals, and participated in Holy Mass, the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross

with the community. The missionaries provided on-demand healthcare assistance, confessions and juridical consultation. In parallel, they conducted door-to-door visits dedicated entirely to prayer and evangelization with the local families as an answer to Christ's call to "go into all the world and preach the gospel," while simultaneously engaging in profound spiritual formation. Results: The mission delivered healthcare aid for both acute and chronic needs to hundreds of vulnerable patients. To ensure treatment continuity, medications and oral hygiene kits were dispensed. These clinical interventions provided significant relief and were highly appreciated by the local primary healthcare network. Beyond measurable medical outcomes, the spiritual impact was substantial: dozens partook in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and numerous others were guided toward local sacramental preparation and invited to Holy Mass. Equally significant was the impact on medical students' formation: witnessing physicians seamlessly blend clinical excellence with their faith strengthened the students' vocational calling to serve in their profession and in life, as well as their commitment to Catholic bioethics, with many reporting that the experience allowed them to intensely live the spirit serving as one in Christ. Conclusion: Integrating faith and science provides an unparalleled environment for integral medical training. The MedCAI initiative stands as a transformative and reproducible model that not only alleviates the immediate suffering of vulnerable populations but also cultivates future healthcare professionals deeply rooted in Catholic bioethics, shaping a new generation dedicated to healing both the body and the soul of its patients.

Palavras-chave: medical education; humanitarian missions; integral care; catholic bioethics; vulnerable populations.