

RESUMO - SAÚDE E ESPIRITUALIDADE

CATHOLIC DOCTORS' AND HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS' ASSOCIATIONS TODAY: TIME FOR A PROFOUND RENEWAL AND ADEQUATE SUPPORT FROM THE CHURCH

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Background: Catholic Doctors' and HealthCare Professionals' Associations (CDHPAs), both national and international, rather frequently struggle to sustain or develop their identity, mission, membership, and activities established and kept during their not-so-remote past. On the other hand, the presence of virtuous doctors and healthcare professionals (DHPs), including those with solid moral convictions in/formed by genuine Christianity, never seemed so needy (and marginalised). Alongside the necessity to rethink, redefine, and rediscover the

true identity, mission, and appropriate possibilities for action of a Catholic DHP (CDHP), the same is needed for CDHPAs. In our paper, although we do not have any instant recipes, we offer some thoughts on these burning conceptual and practical issues, drawing on decades of working experience in the field.

Challenges of Current Medicine and Healthcare: Contemporary medicine and healthcare are marked by rapid scientific/technological advances, demographic shifts, massive migration and displacement emergencies, limited access to essential care, gaps in palliative and long-term care, squandering of precious human and material resources, and growing political and ethical tensions. Serious, intertwined health and social problems are present even in the most developed countries, particularly affecting vulnerable or secluded minorities.

Need for Healthcare Humanisation: The healthcare realities marked by 'multiple crises' pose a pressing question, sometimes articulated by concerned DHPs, philosophers, theologians or the general public, about addressing negative moral/ethical trends and practices, numerous deficiencies and distortions, while bringing in more humane and compassionate attitudes and behaviours. In the healthcare realm, human needs and suffering should be met with both professional competence and compassion, while the humanisation of care entails spiritual ('existential') dimensions. Including religious ones. Enabling possible redemption and even sanctification of all persons involved. From a Catholic perspective, there is a need to reaffirm the priority of pastoral care in healthcare and in the Church's mission. Being fulfilled in the closest collaboration of clergy, religious, and lay persons (CDHPs, volunteers), where CDHPAs may/should play distinct and indispensable roles.

Sustaining and developing CDHPAs: The challenges CDHPAs face today require sound intellectual and moral discernment and well-thought-out actions. Stemming from our experience, following issues are of primary concern if CDHPAs' sustaining and development is to be secured: 1) devoted spiritual life of individual CDHPs, 2) working in small groups, 3) closeness to the Church, 4) spiritual care/accompanying by a devoted priest (or religious), 5) avoiding politicking and concrete political party affiliation, 6) working with younger generation (e.g., through the St. Luke's Societies (as CDHPAs' sections)), 7)

dedicated Holy Masses with subsequent informal and/or educational get-togethers ((bi)monthly), 8) regional or national pilgrimages, symposia, educational courses, spiritual retreats, 9) intelligent and effective use of internet and social media, 10) collegial mentorship, other professional help, 11) international collaboration, networking, support (FIAMC; continental and national CDHPAs).

Conclusions: CDHPAs, to survive and develop, must adopt novel modes of working and acting. They must reaffirm their genuine identity and closeness to the Church. This way, they will prove their vitality and invaluable contribution to the lives of CDHPs, their communities (and nations), medicine and healthcare, and to the Church.

Palavras-chave: catholic doctors' and healthcare professionals' associations; sustainability and development; identity and mission; ways forward; pastoral assistance of the catholic church.