



Relevance and social impact of the medical career on the Isla de la Juventud

Pertinencia e impacto social de la carrera de medicina en la Isla de la Juventud

Bárbara Zenaida Pérez-Pérez¹ 

Mercedes de la Caridad Álvarez-Figueroa¹ 

Margarita del Río de los Reyes¹ 

¹ Facultad de Ciencias Médicas Isla de la Juventud. Isla de la Juventud, Cuba.

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ABSTRACT

The results of the evaluation and accreditation process of the Medicine program at the Faculty of Medical Sciences of the Isle of Youth were analyzed. This process began in 2024 with the self-evaluation phase. The review of the indicators and evidence collected made it possible to identify significant areas for improvement. Despite more than twenty years of the system's existence, sustained efforts to develop the Quality Management System have not yet been institutionalized. This shortcoming significantly limits the institution's capacity to promote qualitative and systematic development, which is essential for fulfilling its social mission. The significance of this finding is considerable, as this faculty plays a key role in the comprehensive training and continuous development of human resources for Cuba's National Health System. It is imperative to prioritize the implementation of a quality management model that is organic, participatory, and focused on continuous improvement. Only in this way can a training process of excellence be ensured, one that meets the highest national and international standards and strengthens the prestige of medical education in the region. The main objective of this research is to analyze the results of the self-evaluation process of the Medicine program at the Faculty of Medical Sciences of the Isle of Youth, with particular emphasis on the variable of relevance and social impact within the context of the implementation of the Evaluation and Accreditation System (SEA).

Keywords: Social impact; Medicine program; Self-evaluation; Quality.

RESUMEN

Se analizaron los resultados del proceso de evaluación y acreditación de la carrera de Medicina en la Facultad de Ciencias Médicas de la Isla de la Juventud, el cual se inició en el año 2024 con la fase de autoevaluación. La revisión de los indicadores y evidencias recopiladas permitió identificar áreas de oportunidad significativas: a pesar de los más de veinte años de existencia del sistema, aún no se ha logrado institucionalizar un trabajo sostenido en el desarrollo del Sistema de Gestión de la Calidad. Esta carencia limita significativamente la capacidad de la institución para impulsar un desarrollo cualitativo y sistemático, que es fundamental para el cumplimiento de su misión social. La trascendencia de este hallazgo es mayúscula, ya que esta facultad es una pieza clave en la formación integral y el perfeccionamiento continuo de los recursos humanos para el Sistema Nacional de Salud de Cuba. Es imperativo priorizar la implementación de un modelo de gestión de la calidad que sea orgánico, participativo y con un enfoque de mejora continua. Solo así se podrá garantizar un proceso formativo de excelencia, que responda a los más altos estándares nacionales e internacionales y fortalezca el prestigio de la educación médica en la región. Esta investigación tiene como objetivo fundamental analizar los resultados del proceso de autoevaluación de la carrera de Medicina en la Facultad de ciencias médicas en la Isla de la Juventud, con especial énfasis en la variable de pertinencia e impacto social, en el contexto de la implementación del SEA.

Palabras clave: Impacto social; Carrera de Medicina; Autoevaluación; Calidad.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, profound changes have occurred worldwide, and the paradigms that supported development in the last century have also been modified (1). Education has not been exempt from these changes. The social development of science, technology, and research, as well as the globalization of the various processes that allow a country to develop in an increasingly competitive world, have led to the adoption of mandatory standards in the field of education to achieve quality recognition of the studies offered at its various levels (2).

In 1998, UNESCO convened the World Conference on Higher Education to plan how this level of education should face the challenges of society on the threshold of the XXI century. The need to achieve greater quality in the processes and outcomes of education has been a concern raised with increasing intensity. Quality is considered an essential attribute of education itself, and all education must be of high quality (3).

The National Accreditation Board (JAN) is the Cuban body responsible for directing and controlling the evaluation and accreditation processes to guarantee the quality of Higher Education in the country. Its central objectives are: to promote, organize, execute, and control the accreditation policy for Higher Education in Cuba (4).

In Cuba, in line with the degree of development achieved by higher education institutions and as part of the Ministry of Higher Education's control system, the University System of Accreditation Programs (SUPRA) was established in 2000. This system has aligned with the demands of the international context and the methodologies and procedures used to create a quality culture in the university community, based on strengthening self-evaluation and external evaluation with a view to accrediting programs and institutions, thus preparing the organization to face the new challenges of this century. The System for Evaluation and Accreditation of University Programs (SEA-CU), implemented in 2002, is an integral part of SUPRA and constitutes the essential element for evaluating and accrediting the quality of programs developed in different institutions. 5 quality variables are identified for the system: (1) Relevance and social impact, (2) Faculty, (3) Students, (4) Infrastructure, and (5) Curriculum. For each variable, indicators are specified, and for each indicator, evaluation criteria are specified (4).

Continuous improvement of the quality of teaching processes in university institutions responsible for the comprehensive training of human resources in health constitutes a necessity to be consistent with the commitment acquired with society that receives graduates. The quality of training and upgrading of human resources and training institutions is among the challenges facing the world today.

The articulation between medical education, medical practice, and the organization of health services facilitates the training of professionals who respond to the economic-social needs of their respective countries and who are also capable of facing current scientific and technical challenges based on cooperation at national and international levels.

The concept of quality is relative, multidimensional, and contextual. Given this contextual nature, when referring to the quality of higher education in Cuba, the following definition has been adopted: 'The system of properties of an institution, program, or process of higher education that intrinsically encompasses its pertinence and academic excellence, allowing it to contribute effectively and efficiently to the management of university processes, as well as to the personal development of students and the transformation of the social environment, according to the demands of society, expressed in previously elaborated and established standards.' (5) In the quality assurance of university programs, self-evaluation plays a fundamental role, and the methodological conception of how to develop it is a necessity. (6)

El SEA-CU es un subsistema del SEAES, es el sistema de evaluación y acreditación de carreras universitarias para realizar su certificación pública, una vez realizado los tres procesos básicos: autoevaluación, evaluación externa y la acreditación de la calidad. (7)

Evaluation and accreditation are mechanisms that help promote the improvement of institutions and programs, thereby providing information and enabling close monitoring of proposed objectives, indicators, and goals; therefore, they present a current challenge in higher education centers (8).

The health accreditation process has become a driving force for service quality. Different organizations develop accreditation programs with international scope, and countries' health systems adopt their own models based on evaluation through optimal and achievable standards (9). This process serves as a fundamental strategic component in fostering a quality culture within the university community and ensures compliance with the established standards for this educational level (10).

The objective of this research is to explain the results of the self-assessment of the Medicine program at the Faculty of Medical Sciences on the Isle of Youth, focusing on the implementation of the SEA-CU and specifically on the relevance and social impact variable.

METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted with the evaluation and accreditation processes of careers developed at the Faculty of Medical Sciences Isla de la Juventud, starting from the year 2024. Qualitative theoretical research methods such as historical-logical, analytical-synthetic, inductive-deductive, and documentary analysis as an empirical method were used. Percentage analysis was applied as a quantitative method for processing the obtained information. The study included students and professors of the Medicine career at the Faculty of Medical Sciences of Isla de la Juventud.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Projection of the profession towards the territory and/or the country

The Medicine program is founded on an eminently scientific, social, and humanistic conception, and has the social mission to train future general practitioners with a solid preparation to face professional problems. This is stimulated from the first year of the program through the link between professors and students in solving the prioritized (scientific-technical) problems of the territory and/or the country through various actions that respond to the needs of their training, in accordance with the social project that the country defends. These actions are aimed at identifying and solving problems of the individual, family, and community in the field of medicine, actively participating in modifying the health profile through the provision of medical and hygienic-epidemiological care, research, values education, and university extension activities. These exercises have been refined and are reflected in the satisfactory working relationships maintained with organizational units of the University itself, with other higher education institutions, as well as with local and national social and mass organizations, validating its relevance and social impact.

State exams are a clear example of the link with professional problems present in the territory or the country, since from a problem-based approach in real or simulated situations, students' knowledge is measured based on its solution.

Interventions carried out in vulnerable (at-risk) populations are highlighted, starting from the activation of the "Carlos Juan Finlay Barres" detachment; thus contributing to the fulfillment of several prioritized health programs, such as: the Maternal and Child Program (PAMI), non-communicable chronic diseases, communicable diseases, and care for the elderly. Students and professors are also linked through their insertion in extension and research projects, via social impact activities that respond to the actions developed by the different honorary chairs, carrying out visits to nursing homes, the pediatric ward of HHB, homes for children without parental support, maternity homes, and secondary and pre-university schools.

A very positive aspect is the existence of institutional and territorial research projects associated with the Calidad de vida program and collaboration agreements in which professors and students participate with impactful results.

Research projects constitute a way to solve problems. The priorities for scientific research are taken as a reference, related to topics of marked impact on society, which, also adjusted to the work objectives of the Ministry of Public Health, contribute to the theoretical, methodological, and practical development of the sciences.

There are two research projects (Predictive factors of residual disease in patients who underwent conization for microinvasive and high-grade lesions, with more than 1000 people directly benefited by the project, and Doctosaludisla) involving 24 teachers (32.8%) and 90 students (69.2%). As part of the strategy, 14 teachers have approved research topics, 10 in the Educational Sciences program at Jesús Montané Oropesa University, and four at the Faculty of Medical Sciences of the Isla de la Juventud. The incorporation of students into these projects is organized through student scientific groups, which favor the development of professional skills related to scientific research work.

The doctoral thesis that contributes to the medical career is: Methodology with an integrative approach to favor the work of the family doctor in the prevention of adolescent pregnancy, at the "Leonilda Tamayo Matos" Polyclinic in the Isle of Youth.

The research carried out at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels essentially responds to the aforementioned research lines. This is evident in the topics addressed in course papers, diploma theses, and in the academic and doctoral training of professors from the career collective and the Faculty in general, as well as other professionals from the territory.

It is evident that there is an economic and social impact of the results of research projects in the territory and in the training process during the quinquennium, since the current design of curriculum E, where Family Medicine is the integrating discipline, facilitates student participation in tasks of social impact through the activities included in the different extension and scientific research projects.

There is an extension project with the participation of 60 students (66.6 % of the course enrollment) and 56 professors (76.7 % of the course faculty). The project 'Ernesto Che Guevara' stands out, which implements actions to honor the legacy of Che by forming citizens committed to social justice, national sovereignty, and international solidarity, applying his ideas to Cuba's current challenges.

The career includes awards and recognitions received at the national and/or international level. The work of professors in training specialists in Comprehensive General Medicine and other medical specialties is highlighted by their performance of high-level academic activities, as well as by their tutoring and advising on the Terminal Works of the Specialties (TTE).

In the years 2024 and 2025, the Faculty of Medical Sciences of the Isle of Youth celebrated the Student Scientific Day honoring the birth of Maceo and Che, as well as the 20th anniversary of the Mario Muñoz Detachment and the inauguration of the chair "For a single health," in which 45 students (34.6%) and 22 of 102 teachers (21.5%) participated. This event demonstrated that science represents the advancement of many achievements obtained today by future researchers, scientists, and leaders who promise a future for the Revolution. This is consistent with the conviction that science is not an isolated discipline but an activity requiring collaboration from different areas and disciplines, as interdisciplinarity is key to addressing the most complex problems in society. During 2024 and 2025, the festivals organized by the class were held. These events served as a fundamental platform where students displayed a diverse range of skills. Five students received awards. Notably, three students from the degree program have published research in Cuban scientific journals. This milestone reflects the academic excellence of the students and the institution's commitment to training professionals who directly contribute to the national scientific sector. Publication in Cuban journals underscores the relevance and local impact of their research, connecting knowledge generated in the classroom with the needs and development of Cuba.

In 2024, the Municipal Museum of the Isle of Youth hosted the 1st Base History Forum, an event that featured notable participation by students. The event served as a convergence point between local historical heritage and the training of future health professionals.

Los profesores participan en el proceso de categorización docente, cambios y ratificación de categoría docente, exámenes para optar por el título de especialistas de primer y segundo grado, tribunales para los exámenes estatales y maestrías. Se cuenta en la carrera de medicina con 37 instructores, 31 asistentes, 34 auxiliares, dos doctores en ciencias y 56 másteres, para un 54,3 %, de 103 docentes, 79 especialistas de primer grado y 20 especialistas de segundo grado, hasta el 04 de noviembre de 2025.

Los profesionales, en los últimos cinco años y solamente en la revista electrónica de la Facultad exhiben una limitada producción científica, y participación en eventos, pertenecientes a las diversas especialidades que conforman la carrera; lamentablemente el menor por ciento de ellos se corresponde con profesionales que laboran en la Atención Primaria de Salud; esta situación deberá ser revertida en los momentos actuales, donde la evaluación profesoral constituye un arma importante para la estimulación de los profesionales.

These findings reveal the participation, involvement, and commitment of students, teachers, and teaching support staff in impactful tasks, community projects, and Cuban society, all of which contribute to comprehensive training and demonstrate the outcomes in the political-ideological formation of students and teachers. The teaching support staff has a participation rate of 7.93% (out of 63 workers, only 5 actively participate in activities). Extension activities, in addition to influencing the comprehensive training of future professionals, favor the preservation of the municipality's cultural traditions.

Through the Isla Visión telecenter, Radio Caribe, and the written press, the activities of student and pedagogical groups, as well as the impact of extension actions on health indicators in the territory, have been disseminated. Students in the degree program systematically participate in television and radio programs such as “Voz universitaria” and the series “Esperanza,” where the topic of drugs is addressed and health promotion and health education actions are carried out.

The municipal newspaper “Victoria” (print and digital) has echoed the results of the race in torch marches, scientific-student conferences, workshops, and national and international events.

Relationships with Victoria de Girón University for the development of activities such as class festivals are evident. Students carry out education-in-work activities at HHBB, as well as in other services. The Medicine program has also had international projection in problem-solving, based on the advisory work of many of its faculty members abroad; despite institutional and personal efforts, no agreements or other forms of legally established collaboration with foreign institutions have been achieved.

FCMIJ is supported by a national collaboration network that allows it to overcome its insular geographic condition, ensuring that its graduates and the local health system have access to the most advanced knowledge and practices in the country. For example, it collaborates with UCMH, UCMPR, UCMVC, and UCMC for experience exchanges, joint research projects in specific areas, and faculty mobility. It also works with national institutes and research centers, such as the Institute of Nephrology, Pedro Kourí Institute of Tropical Medicine, Hermanos Ameijeiras General Teaching Hospital, Juan Manuel Márquez Pediatric Hospital, and Ramón González Coro Gynecobstetric Hospital.

Satisfaction with the quality of the training process

A specific procedure exists for measuring impacts and monitoring graduates, which enables the collection of opinions and criteria from students, faculty members, other health personnel involved in the training process, employers, patients, and their families.

No se puede verificar el grado de satisfacción de profesores, estudiantes, empleadores y egresados con la calidad del proceso de formación, para que se constate el dominio de las habilidades relativas al ejercicio de la profesión y por ende en la concreción del modelo del profesional de la salud, con un alto conocimiento científico y pedagógico, así como una gran calidad humana y en valores, lo cual es una de las prioridades que desde sus inicios tiene el claustro de la carrera, que debe ser corroborado a partir del constante monitoreo y evaluación de impactos y seguimiento a los egresados por parte de los directivos en cada nivel organizativo del PDE. La asignatura de inglés es la única que evidencia un repositorio de bibliografía digital a partir de los terceros años (inglés V al VIII), donde la bibliografía impresa para 1. y 2. años es escasa. La bibliografía de las asignaturas básicas no presenta problemas ni en formato impreso ni digital.

Systematic attention is given to the continuous development of graduates through the wide range of improvement opportunities offered by the profession, which impact the quality of their professional performance, as evidenced by high-level doctoral and specialization programs, in addition to fostering applied research projects. 28 doctors benefit, according to Resolution 108/2004.

The demands of graduates and their participation in certain training activities are considered, based on the residency regime.

Surveys must be conducted with employers and graduates to verify the level of satisfaction with their training process, in accordance with the professional responsibilities of the physician and the values defined in the educational strategy of the program and academic years. The ultimate goal is to deliver to society a graduate capable of solving the health problems of individuals, families, and communities, and to achieve acceptance by all institutions in the health sector.

Recognition of the career by health institutions has increased considerably. Their faculty are involved in the successful organization of municipal and provincial events, participating as speakers, presenters, and as members and chairs of committees formed to select works that will be presented nationally and internationally. In addition, they invite both teachers and students to participate in events held on the occasion of their founding anniversaries, balance assemblies, and other activities.

The demands of graduates and their participation in certain training activities are addressed positively, serving as a foundation through systematic follow-up of graduates via the wide range of improvement opportunities offered by the degree program, such as workshops, courses, diplomas, and specialties, which impact the quality of their professional performance. It is noteworthy that many graduates have been cadres or reserves, and others currently hold such positions.

In the diploma programs developed, the satisfaction level of participants in all editions is 100%, as indicated by surveys, with participants recognizing the quality of the teachers who are part of the faculty of the aforementioned postgraduate actions.

The Faculty of Medical Sciences on the Isle of Youth has a research project associated with a priority program that contributes to improving the health status of the population. All professors and 100% of the students participate in an extensionist project that contributes to comprehensive training by successfully developing actions that guarantee the fulfillment of the output objectives of the general practitioner. The entire university community participates in social impact tasks that demonstrate the results of their political-ideological training, highlighting the program's impact in the territory. Accessible postgraduate improvement opportunities are available to graduates, with ample possibilities of courses, workshops, diplomas, and specialties offered by the program.

However, weaknesses are manifested in terms of: sustained linkage between teachers and students, with a high level of commitment, which guarantees the solution of prioritized problems of the territory and/or the country (which titles, how many, students, tutor, results-events and publications); no relationships with specialists from foreign institutions; lack of evidence from the last five years; no procedure for measuring impacts and monitoring graduates that allows knowing opinions and criteria of those involved in the training process. In the last five years, satisfaction surveys have not been conducted among the different actors of the process at the different organizational levels; there are insufficient publications in the backlog of the institution's own journal; and the link between department heads, the information center, and the personnel department for the visibility of authors and publications in high-impact journals is limited.

To address the deficiencies, a plan has been drawn up to collect evidence from the last five years, develop a procedure for measuring impacts and monitoring graduates that allows knowing opinions and criteria of those involved in the training process, conduct satisfaction surveys at each level, increase publications in the backlog of the institution's own journal, maintain a link between the personnel department and the information center for the visibility of authors with publications in high-impact journals, and establish a work system that enables cooperation with specialists from foreign institutions.

To ensure continuous improvement and compliance with quality standards, the Accreditation Committee of the Faculty of Medicine meets monthly. These sessions serve as a formal forum for monitoring and evaluating the established work plan. The central purpose of these meetings is to comprehensively analyze the results and performance indicators generated by the Medicine program. This includes, but is not limited to, data on student academic performance, results from satisfaction surveys (directed at students, graduates, and employers), levels of research and scientific output, and the effectiveness of clinical practices.

Through a systematic review of the information, the committee not only identifies strengths and achievements but also conducts a thorough identification of areas for improvement. This dual analysis allows:

Corroborating the positive impact of the activities and strategies implemented by the faculty, thus validating the successful practices that should be maintained and enhanced.

Accurately diagnosing the weaknesses that prevent the achievement of planned objectives, which facilitates evidence-based decision-making.

The final result of this periodic process is the creation of a specific, focused corrective action plan. This plan aims to reinforce progress and effectively address the detected deficiencies, ensuring that all activities undertaken by the faculty contribute significantly and measurably to academic excellence and the accreditation process.

CONCLUSIONS

The self-evaluation process undertaken by the Medicine program on the Isle of Youth has facilitated an exhaustive analysis that transcends the academic realm to delve into its community essence. A key finding is the program's high relevance, which effectively addresses the specific health needs of the territory. This alignment with the local context is not a minor detail; it is the fundamental pillar that enhances the social impact of graduates, who integrate into the health system with deep knowledge of the reality they serve.

However, the path to excellence has revealed areas of opportunity to further strengthen educational quality, particularly in resource optimization and the ongoing updating of teaching methodologies. These actions are crucial to consolidating a professional profile that, without losing its local roots, remains at the forefront of global health challenges.

The career is a vital project for the development of the Island, whose success is founded on its social commitment. The future challenge is to institutionalize a permanent cycle of self-evaluation and continuous improvement, ensuring that medical training is not only of high quality but also a driver of transformation and well-being for the community it serves. This constant feedback between academia and society guarantees its sustainability and relevance.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS

Drafting – original draft: Bárbara Zenaida Pérez-Pérez, Mercedes de la Caridad Álvarez-Figueredo, Margarita del Río de los Reyes.

Writing–review and editing: Bárbara Zenaida Pérez-Pérez, Mercedes de la Caridad Álvarez-Figueredo, Margarita del Río de los Reyes.