

## Argentine pediatrics in the coming years

Pediatrics has always been characterized by the biopsychosocial approach of all issues related to childhood and adolescence.

With this extended perspective, the care of pediatric patients implies the need for our involvement in the social determinants of the health-disease process, understanding wellbeing not only as the absence of disease, but rather aiming for children and adolescents to be able to reach their maximum potential for growth and development, in a setting of support, affection, and quality education.

In the coming years, as pediatricians, we will have to face serious health care consequences, resulting from the social and economic damage caused by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. In Argentina, more than 50 % of children and adolescents are currently living in poverty, with deficiencies in their nutrition, mental health, immunizations, and education. More than ever before, we will have to practice a humanized medicine, with a great deal of empathy towards our patients and their families.

Current knowledge on the “first 1000 days” concept indicates that these early life moments greatly determine health throughout the course of an individual’s life. This highlights even more the role of pediatricians, convinced that the true prevention, for instance, of adult non-communicable chronic conditions (one of the main public health problems worldwide) begins in childhood, and that pediatricians’ advice and attitude are still deeply respected by society in general.

Mandatory social distancing has deepened and evidenced Argentina’s serious educational problems, underscoring the great difference in opportunities between those who can access curricular contents remotely and those who were not able to get them due to lack of internet connection and/or devices. This serious educational consequence is further exacerbated by the loss of the school as a setting for social development and emotional support among our patients.

As society, with the lack of in-person school attendance, we have lost a very important “social capital” for pediatric patients’ support and education, especially in the most vulnerable sectors. This clear social consequence is even more evident among adolescents who, after losing

the continuous connection with the educational setting, are more exposed to social problems typical of this stage of life (violence in all its forms, problematic substance use, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections).

Pediatricians are forced to defend this critical space for the adequate development of children and adolescents, by accompanying health and educational authorities in order to create the best safety conditions in the school setting, convinced that health and education are two indivisible rights from a pediatric standpoint and that school is where this concept is best secured and developed.

Communication and knowledge technologies have achieved a very important boost in these years of pandemic, affecting two critical aspects of medical practice. They have facilitated access to updated scientific information and the remote implementation of different continuing medical education activities. In addition, from the health care perspective, they have helped to stay in contact with patients in a setting of mandatory social distancing. Although this has facilitated visits, it should not overshadow the better quality of face-to-face consultations in general pediatrics, in which we may fully apply the biopsychosocial concept while accompanying children and adolescents and their families, through verbal and non-verbal language and an adequate physical examination.

These challenges for pediatrics in the coming years will have to be faced by simultaneously updating and implementing in health care practice the new knowledge developed by translational medicine, in which different disciplines work together to produce new evidence in order to better understand biological phenomena and access new diagnostic and therapeutic options. Likewise, pediatric research will have to continue generating the best knowledge and guidelines to address our daily problems.

Without a doubt, from this comprehensive perspective, the role of pediatrics in Argentina in the coming years will require a major effort on our part, but our patients and their families, who expect the best from us, fully justify our ongoing hard work in order to honor the main purpose of the Sociedad Argentina de Pediatría: “Striving for a healthy childhood and adolescence in a better world.”

In addition, we must remember that pediatrics is not only a medical specialty, but “a way of being” that distinguishes us within the medical universe.

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