

Scientific societies in health education and promotion in the school setting

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Scientific societies are usually related to “continuous professional development” and knowledge management;¹ they are much less frequently linked to direct community action activities. At the initiative of the Board of Directors of the Asociación Civil Salteña de Pediatría-SAP (Sociedad Argentina de Pediatría) Salta Branch, from September 2023 to September 2024, the institution developed outreach and health promotion activities in schools in the capital city of Salta and the interior of the province.² This activity was carried out jointly with different Salta Branch committees to focus the project on health education, promoting healthy habits, and preventing diseases and accidents in children and adolescents in private and public schools.

The development of the program was based on the training of school children from 6 to 18 years of age on health topics, including healthy eating, safe sleep, responsible use of screens, physical changes during growth, comprehensive sex education, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, prevention of cyberbullying, grooming and sexting, emotion management and importance of the physical activity in health care during different stages of childhood/adolescence.

After an open call, the schools (public and private) that would participate were selected, and

the program was presented to their authorities to verify its feasibility in each institution. The activity was attended by 13 pediatricians from the SAP Salta Branch and the collaboration of two child neurologists from the Argentine League against Epilepsy (LACE, by its Spanish acronym). The professionals developed a prevention topic defined by the directors of each institution for each grade or curricular year.

In 2023, four outings were made to different institutions, and in 2024, eight visits were made to other schools. In addition, a visit was made to a special school for children with hearing and speech conditions. The participating schools were in the capital city of Salta and the province's interior (Cafayate and Olacapato). In total, 140 45-minute workshops were provided, with the participation of 5076 children and adolescents.

The students participated very actively during the classroom presentations, expressing their doubts about the topics developed by the professionals or asking questions and answers on the points they wanted to deepen that day. In addition, health or family problems among the participants could be detected, and appropriate actions were taken in each case.

We also sought to allow parents and educators to give their opinions on their knowledge of the

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5546/aap.2024-10603.eng>

To cite: Bastianelli C, Araujo M, Cataldi L, Aleman A, Olleta C, Pineda M, et al. Scientific societies in health education and promotion in the school setting. *Arch Argent Pediatr*. 2025;e202410603. Online ahead of print 19-JUN-2025.

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topic discussed in the classroom, whether they could talk to their children and students about the subject, and the responsible adult's opinion about the program. For this reason, at the end of the activity, digital surveys were sent out to the parents of the students and directors of the institutions.

Surveys of school administrators showed a high degree of acceptance of the program and interest in continuing with this proposal. The students also commented positively about this program; they were receptive and pleased that the doctors talked to them about these topics. Finally, most of the parents surveyed stated that their children were able to speak at home about the health topics developed in the classrooms and that the issues they would most like to see addressed in future meetings would be sexuality and drug abuse.

This is the first time the SAP Salta Branch has carried out an outreach activity for health promotion purposes, which is a gratifying experience for professionals and students. This interaction between a scientific society and the educational community enriches both, thus improving the institution-community bond.

This articulation, which is not coincidentally one of the central axes of international initiatives on the subject, such as WHO's Health Promoting Schools,³ was possible and satisfactory.

It may constitute a first step towards a more prolific exchange between health and education organizations, laying the groundwork for health promotion programs that not only involve activities

to provide knowledge, skills, and competencies to children and adolescents in the natural setting of the school,⁴ but also include the generation of specific guidelines for this area, as in other countries.^{5,6}

The Sociedad Argentina de Pediatría contemplates various actions that involve the community; the introductory CPR workshops are probably the best known. The initiative of the SAP Salta Branch seeks to take advantage of the school environment to bring essential knowledge about children's health, offered in a friendly format and with the best scientific support. ■

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