

# CURRENT CHALLENGES OF THE MOVEMENT OF STUDENT ASSISTANTS “FRAN PAÍS GARCÍA” IN THE UNIVERSITIES OF MEDICAL SCIENCES OF CUBA

Laura Adalys Guillen León;  
Carlos Miguel Campos Sánchez;  
Isbetti Acosta Escanaverino;

*Villa Clara University of Medical Sciences, Cuba*

**P**rofound changes have occurred in Cuban medical education. Some aspects of this transformation represent radical changes, others a deepening of processes already under development. Together, these changes reflect the need over the past 4 decades to: 1) increase the training of physicians to meet the needs of the entire population; 2) educate students who are scientifically prepared and committed to the community; and 3) integrate skills, basic knowledge and commitment to specific health problems in Cuba and in other countries where future doctors can work <sup>(1)</sup>.

For the fulfillment and consolidation of the aforementioned points, one of the actions implemented was the creation of the movement of student assistants “Frank País García” (MAA).

The MAA arose as a result of university students taking on the task of facing the growing needs of teaching in Cuba, a consequence of the massive exodus of teachers during the 1960s <sup>(2)</sup>.

Article 237 of resolution 2/2018 of the Ministry of Higher Education defines assistant students as: “those students with high educational achievement, previously selected in the careers, both at the

headquarters and at the university sites, distinguished by show faster assimilation rates, favorable aptitudes for learning one or more disciplines of the study plan and for scientific research or technical development work. These students will be able to carry out complementary tasks to their study plan, in order to train them as teachers or future researchers, and thus contribute to meeting the needs of universities and scientific research centers” <sup>(3)</sup>.

In medical sciences, students who aspire to join the ranks of the MAA are selected by the aforementioned criteria, thus complying with what is stipulated in said resolution, in such a way that they are characterized by being students with excellent results in all spheres, especially in teaching and research. Once the student joins the ranks of this movement, he has the duty to comply with his activity plan and its objectives.

The movement has among its fundamental objectives: to support the educational teaching process, direct the professional orientation towards certain specialties, fundamentally those that are in deficit, and accelerately acquire skills as a teacher, researcher or specific to a specialty <sup>(4)</sup>.

Therefore, the assistantship allows them to delve into the contents of certain specialties of the medical sciences and be part of the teaching-learning process in the Medicine career <sup>(5)</sup>.

Having mentioned the objectives pursued by the MAA within the medical sciences, as well as the

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definition of what a student assistant represents, it is appropriate to comment on what are the main challenges that it faces in the Universities of Medical Sciences of our country in addition to of five decades of creation.

Among its current challenges we can mention the best advice from tutors to their students, especially in the field of scientific research, which ranges from student motivation for topics of interest that constitute a fertile quarry for conducting research, to the adequate advice of the same. Although it must be recognized that most tutors facilitate the teaching of theoretical and practical knowledge, related to the specialty of the assistantship in question; But they put aside the planning and carrying out of research projects together with their students, which represents skewing their opportunity in the area of conducting research that contributes to solving problems present in the development scenario of the own assistantship.

It is valid to clarify that the genesis of this problem is the fact that the student's tutor must play a double role, since he must fulfill his functions from the care point of view and at the same time satisfy the attention that the student demands, a fact that becomes even more complex if we analyze the great care burden to which the tutor may be subjected.

Another challenge lies in the acquisition and development of methodological teaching knowledge, one of the objectives to be achieved by every student assistant, in such a way that they are capable not only of participating in the Class Festival

at their different levels, but also capable of be inserted within the teaching field of the university, by imparting with quality some educational activities included in the study plan in order to the specialty in which he is a student assistant, as well as applying in the same teaching aids preferably elaborated by the same. In this aspect, the methodological teaching departments based in the universities play an essential role, which should reinforce the preparation from the pedagogical point of view of the students and at the same time increase the opportunities to demonstrate the acquired knowledge, systematically planning the teaching activities that could to impart. All of this would contribute in the short term to further increase the number of student assistants who, upon graduation, hold the category of undergraduate instructors and in the long term to have a greater number of professionals with the teaching category prepared to provide high-quality teaching.

But perhaps the greatest challenge of the movement in the universities of medical sciences is that finally that student assistant remains faithful to his assistantship and opts for the specialty to end with it, through the example of the vertical internship. The soul and the success of the movement lies in it and it is that without a doubt the most complete way to be able to count on a highly trained professional in terms of knowledge and skills begins with obtaining the assistantship and taking advantage of it. This is only achieved with perfect harmony and coordination between the university, the center where the assistantship takes place, the tutor and the student assistant.

Despite the challenges, the MAA in medical sciences constitutes a way of committing the student to that specialty for which they feel a vocation and a greater interest, it is to open the doors to a world where they have the possibility of studying and preparing from a further stage early, it is the way to motivate the student and lead him to the path that leads him to become a much better professional from the point of view of care, research and methodological teaching in

the not too distant future at the height of the times. Although the MAA of these universities has achieved positive results over all these years, much remains

to be done in order to improve their performance.

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