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The university hospital: Criteria for its accreditation[☆]

El hospital universitario: criterios para su acreditación

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Law 44/2003, of 21st November, on the Regulation of Health Professions, decrees that universities may establish agreements with health services, institutions and health centres that, in each case, are necessary to ensure the required healthcare training.¹ The number of university hospitals and health centres should be adequate to achieve quality education and to achieve the economic sustainability of the model. Each autonomous community, therefore, must propose the number of students it can assume in its universities, public or private, so that in the country, as a whole, the limit established by the University Coordination Council is not exceeded, quality education is guaranteed in all centres and funding of the additional costs associated with the recognition of a hospital or a health centre as “university” is ensured.²

Previously, the General Healthcare Law 14/1986 assigned care, training and research tasks to all hospitals,³ but did not grant the status of “university” to all National Health System centres. At present the ministerial order of 7th August 1987 continues in force,⁴ which establishes what must be the requirements to be met by hospitals and university health centres, following the indications of the Royal Decree 1558/1986, of 28th June, which established the

general bases of the agreement system between universities and health institutions.⁵

Recently, the fifth point of article 4 of the Royal Decree 1558/1986 has been modified, within Royal Decree 420/2015, of 29th May on the establishment, recognition, authorization and accreditation of universities and university centres.⁶ Its third final provision indicates that “*The denomination of university hospital will be used when the agreement refers to the hospital as a whole or covers most of its services or care units; if only some services are included in the agreement, it will be referred to as a university-associated hospital. The same will apply to primary care centres*”. This provision, in response to the request of the National Conference of Deans of Medical Schools of Spain (CNDFME), adds that “*a university hospital can only be linked by agreement to a university to teach the same university degree. Exceptionally, with the exclusive purpose of carrying out practices and based on specific agreements, there may be students from other universities, after consulting in writing to the associated university*”. It is a modification that has been very well received, given the health organization's involvement in practical teaching, the relationship of health professionals with the corresponding

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¹ Document approved at the Assembly of the National Conference of Deans of Medical Schools of Spain held at the Medical School of Salamanca on 21st April 2017 (the names of all the signatories are listed in Annex).

university and the availability of all resources and the full portfolio of services for the teaching of medicine makes it extremely difficult for a university hospital to teach students from different medical schools.²

The training of health professionals requires careful planning and collaboration between all the institutions involved, including university hospitals and health centres, medical schools and regional organizations. The hospital must guarantee medical students the possibility of carrying out practical activities in the areas of hospitalization, medical consultations, surgery, and in the emergency and critical care units, among others. The university hospital must direct the teaching of medicine towards the acquisition of clinical competences by the student, so it would be recommended that the latter participates actively in the design and development of said process.

For years, the Conference of Deans of Medical Schools of Spain has been demanding the reform of RD 1558/1986, a regulation perhaps valid at the time, but nowadays overcome by the social and political changes that have taken place in our country in recent decades. There is no doubt that a university hospital must be a centre that meets pre-established requirements and that, consequently, it must be accredited to begin its teaching activity in the degree of medicine. For the same reasons, these centres of excellence would have to be periodically audited by an independent body, in the same way that MIR (resident doctor) training is audited. The reality, however, is that there is not a valid homogeneous national system for the accreditation of university hospitals and it is obvious that there is no national registry of university hospitals either. There is a national registry of hospitals with teaching accreditation, but this accreditation refers to the qualification of health care centres or services as teaching units for the training of specialists in health sciences, but not in the training of degree students.^{2,7}

The university hospital should provide clinical training to medical students and residents and should be recognized, to a large extent, by its clinical and applied research activity. It is necessary, therefore, to design a university hospital model that guarantees the quality of the education it imparts and the relevance of the knowledge it generates, to serve as a guide to hospitals and primary care centres that aim to reach that category.⁸⁻¹²

The teaching that takes place in a university hospital must be a task involving the whole institution and all its professionals, including training specialists through the MIR system. Teaching objectives should be inexcusably contemplated in the management contract agreed by the management of the university hospital and those responsible for the services and units. Both teaching and research must be fully recognized in a doctor's professional development, being a key merit in the recruitment of health professionals. Permanent university professors must develop their healthcare work along with their teaching and research tasks from their associated medical posts. Likewise, there must be a representation of the corresponding medical school in the management bodies of the health centre. In the same way, the health institution must be represented in the university governing bodies.⁸⁻¹⁰

In short, the university hospital must be a centre of excellence and must be able to ensure compliance with

pre-established requirements regarding its structure, its service portfolio, care resources, teaching classrooms, library, minimum rates for a correct relationship between students and patients, clinical committees, research areas, etc. Additionally, the hospital that aims to be a university hospital must have a minimum number of professors and doctors.^{11,12}

With all the above, the university hospital can be defined as a tertiary hospital, in which all or almost all health specialties are represented (general hospital) and in which, on the basis of quality care, a teaching activity is carried out, both in the undergraduate level (medical students, among others) as well as a graduate level (resident doctors and residents of other healthcare professions), as well as carrying out quality clinical and experimental research. All this must be possible thanks to the existence of multidisciplinary teams in which translational research (from the clinic to the laboratory, as well as from the laboratory to the clinic) is a tangible and measurable reality.^{2,7-12}

Criteria for the accreditation of a university hospital

Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications,¹³ states in article 24.3.d. that "basic medical training will ensure that the person concerned has acquired adequate clinical experience in hospitals under appropriate supervision". Therefore, in the university hospital, the three aspects of medical knowledge management converge: care, research and teaching. Therefore, the requirements to be able to accredit a hospital as "university" should refer to these aspects, as indicated below.⁷

Association

A university hospital can only be associated to a university to teach the same university degree. The aim is to ensure the teaching's quality and organization, as well as to preserve the institutional ethos and the proper transmission of values of each academic centre.

The university hospital must have a written plan of care, teaching and research objectives, as well as an annual report of activities. They must also have quality assurance commissions in order to standardize and guarantee diagnostic and therapeutic processes.

Structure

The university hospital must have an adequate infrastructure for the development of teaching and research. It must also exist with an accredited teaching unit for the training of medical specialists and health sciences in most recognized specialties, according to the procedure regulated in article 26.3 of Law 44/2003, of 21st November, of Regulation of Health Professions, which allows the educational continuum.

The university hospital must have sufficient classrooms, specific research laboratories, a well-equipped library with adequate opening times for the needs of the hospital and medical students, with access to publications and books that are considered important and significant in relation to the health sciences.

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