



CARTA AL DIRECTOR

Sleep quality in medical students in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

Calidad de Sueño en estudiantes de medicina en el contexto de la pandemia por COVID-19

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Dear Director:

Sleep can be defined as a state of reversible unconsciousness due to stimuli, which behaves as a circadian biological phenomenon made up of phases or states with an ultradian frequency of appearance. Multiple possible functions of sleep have been described, fundamentally in the nervous system itself: in nervous maturity, mental health, thermoregulation, metabolic energy conservation and the elimination of waste substances. Its role in cognition, facilitation of learning and memory is highlighted.⁽¹⁾

This emphasizes the importance of sleep in university students, particularly in medical students, a population of special interest due to the cognitive demand that they have to overcome in their career that coexists with periodic sleep deprivation as part of it and of age-appropriate behaviors.

In situations as stressful as the current global pandemic of COVID-19, all these facts come together and take on particular relevance. In the general population, anxiety levels have increased. University students have been affected by quarantine and the temporary suspension of face-to-face teaching activities, and show signs of anxiety, depression and sleep disorders, and even manifesting symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorders.

Few studies have been carried out on this, however, at the beginning of the pandemic, an evaluation in China found 33,2 % poor sleep quality in a sample of 1,026 students.⁽²⁾ Similarly, in a cross-sectional study published by Saguen BN et al.,⁽³⁾ there is evidence of a high prevalence of sleep quality (72,5 %) that correlated with impaired quality of life, with increased sleep latency, alterations in same, and daytime dysfunction.

According to Kaparounaki CK et al. ,⁽⁴⁾ a delay in the sleep phase occurs in youth, which can favor the appearance of disorders such as anxiety and depression, since these disorders are more frequent in patients with these alterations. Likewise, the study by Vílchez et al.⁽⁵⁾ found a significant association between poor sleep quality, anxiety and depression, parameters that, under situations of sustained stress, such as that caused by the current pandemic disease, may be altered.

It is therefore essential today to evaluate these determinants and give rise to the search for solutions, since the radical change in traditional methods for teaching medicine developed in the context of the pandemic. Staying at home, sustained insomnia and modification of the lifestyles of the doctor in training, actively influence the habits and perception of sleep.

Conflict of Interests

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