



Empathy and com-compassion: The medicine the world needs

Empatía y com-pasión: la medicina que el mundo necesita

Empatia e compaixão: o remédio que o mundo precisa

Angélica María Pérez Cano¹

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“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.
If you want to be happy, practice compassion”.

Dalai Lama

Disease-related malnutrition is increasingly prevalent in our health institutions and, somehow, all that we have discussed in different academic scenarios still does not come into fruition. In clinical practice we continue to find patients with prolonged fasting, patients without reassessment after initial measurements that show no evidence of risk, no timely or early nutritional interventions, prejudices, no adaptations or changes based on individual patient culture to improve food acceptance or when calculating nutritional objectives before starting nutritional therapy. In short, there is no proper nutritional follow-up to ensure the optimal quality nutrition that is our duty to provide.

The poor quality of nutritional care fills us with reasons to continue to work hard from the Colombian Association of Clinical Nutrition (ACNC) in the furtherance of this nationally and internationally held dream of letting our patients touch our souls so that we can transform our care and approach them as if they were close relatives.

As president of our prestigious ACNC and for several years now, it has been my own personal challenge to work on building empathy among all nutritional therapy groups. Today, I want to share with you a personal

experience that has intensified the desire to see the work of creating awareness regarding the need to provide the best nutritional care for our patients as a true mission.

My son, a young man of only 16, suffers from intracranial hypertension. At one point he had to be admitted to the intensive care unit four times at one-month intervals. Every time we came back from the hospital we fell into despair as his nutritional status declined and we saw how all the signs of profound physical deconditioning described in our text books, including sarcopenia and fragility, took hold of this young boy. The worst thing of all was that I felt that being a nutritionist and working as president of ACNC to create awareness regarding the importance of nutritional care were of no avail and did nothing to get someone in the institution to actually pay attention to his declining nutritional status.

Personally, I believe that empathy and compassion are what really move the world and are the forces needed at all levels to transform reality. Empathy is the intellectual and emotional ability to place oneself in the situation of others and understand their feelings and way of thinking; but empathy requires professionals who are willing to listen to their patients and caregivers. That is why it is time today to invite and make an urgent appeal to those of you who read this letter to improve your clinical practice coming from empathy and com-compassion. This means “feeling with another,” becoming aware of the different realities and providing care with love. Let us always remember that caring is our mission.

Going back to my son and his nutritional deterioration, he lost 12% of his weight, 8% of his muscle mass and his strength diminished by 10 kg over the course of only 6 months. Today, after several months at home and one diffi-

*Correspondencia: Angélica María Pérez Cano.
presidencia@nutriclinicacolombia.org



cult surgery, he has been unable to go back to the sports he loves, or recover his strength and physical condition.

Today, my empathy and com-*passion* are ever stronger and, for the rest of my life, I will look for partners to build an army of professionals who are willing to take ownership of every patient who comes our way in need of nutritional care.

This is a very important issue of our journal, aimed at creating awareness regarding the need for a mandatory nutritional care process that will enable us to improve the figures of disease-related and iatrogenic hospital-related malnutrition that we see in our everyday practice.

Thank you to those among you who have already internalized the meaning of “caring” and who give their best for their patients every minute of every day. We have a long way to go in our work of impregnating our peers, leaders, colleagues, advisors and insurers with this same passion and drive to continue treading ahead, and let everyone know that it can be done.

Today I write from my heart and as the human being behind the president to invite all readers to transform the world so that we can see the dawn of a better tomorrow in nutritional therapy.

“See with the eyes of another, listen with the ears of another and feel with the heart of another.”

Alfred Adler



Angélica María Pérez Cano,
ND, Esp, MSc
President of the Asociación
Colombiana de Nutrición
Clínica (ACNC). Dietitian
Nutritionist, Master in
Clinical Nutrition.