

The teaching of pediatric dentistry in Peru and the role of humanistic simulation: twenty years later

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Dear Editor:

In 2004, Castillo et al. (1) published the article entitled “The Teaching of Pediatric Dentistry in Peru” in the Revista Estomatológica Herediana, in which they highlighted the fragmentation of pediatric dentistry education and the predominance of technical skills over comprehensive training. Among their principal findings, they emphasized the limited attention devoted to child behavior management, even though this is the core of pediatric dental clinical practice.

Twenty years later, it is necessary to revisit this reflection and assess how much progress has been made. Although challenges in curricular design persist, we now have innovative pedagogical tools that enable a more effective response to the issues identified in that article. One of these is clinical simulation with a humanistic approach, whose value is particularly evident in pediatric dentistry. Recent reviews confirm that simulation-based learning promotes both technical and non-technical competencies in health education, including dentistry (2, 3).

In some dental specialties, technical dimension may predominate. In pediatric dentistry, however, without behavior management and empathic communication skills, clinical success is impossible. The challenge of teaching students to manage children’s anxiety, communicate with parents, and foster a trusting environment cannot be addressed solely in the clinical setting, but rather in the safe and reflective practice environments provided by simulation. Scenarios involving standardized patients—such as an anxious child accompanied by a concerned mother, a defiant adolescent, or a neurodiverse patient—not only train behavioral management techniques (tell-show-do, positive reinforcement, and distraction), but also foster essential ethical and communicative dimensions through scenarios designed with a focus on inclusion and respect for diversity.

In Peru, the inauguration of the Interdisciplinary Center for Advanced Simulation at Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia in 2025 represents a significant advancement in national and regional dental education (4). As one

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of the largest in Latin America, it is equipped with technical simulation resources such as haptic simulators and phantom heads, as well as scenarios featuring actors that allow students to practice communication skills in their undergraduate years. From my experience as a simulation instructor in Stomatology at this center, I believe that pediatric dentistry now has an environment conducive to integrating technical skills and humanity into its teaching.

The reflection proposed by Castillo et al. (1) remains fully relevant. However, twenty years later, it is not enough to simply recognize the importance of behavior management, but we must actively implement it through humanistic simulation. I use this term to refer to scenarios that integrate communicative, emotional, ethical, and relational skills in addition to technical skills. Although there is not yet a terminological consensus in dentistry, this approach has been explored in medical education under the concept of non-technical skills simulation (3). The time is now, and Peruvian pediatric dentistry has the opportunity to advance regionally in this field.

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