

A Locally Led Model of Healthcare Innovation: How Argentina's Universidad Hospital Italiano Puts Patients First

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Founded by the Hospital Italiano of Buenos Aires, one of the oldest and most prestigious hospitals in Argentina and Latin America, the Universidad Hospital Italiano has become a leading institution in the region. With a mission focused on the comprehensive training of professionals, continuing professional development, research, and initiatives that strengthen community ties while promoting sustainable development, the University has implemented a patient-centered care model at the Hospital and ensures patient safety through simulation-based training.

A HOSPITAL ROOTED IN COMMUNITY, AND RANKED AMONG THE WORLD'S BEST

Established by the Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires in Argentina 26 years ago, Universidad Hospital Italiano functions as a nonprofit, and is one of the most academically- and technologically advanced teaching hospitals in the world. It's ranked first in Argentina, third in Latin America, and in the top 100 in the world. Home to nearly 700 undergraduate students in nine career tracks, 18,000 postgraduate students, and nearly 600 Residents and 300 Fellows, the university is dedicated to the comprehensive education of healthcare professionals and continuous research to promote the health of the communities they serve.

To fulfill their mission, the university and the hospital reinvest the income generated by their medical services, educational activities, and research programs into the development and growth of both institutions.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF HEALTHCARE MISSION

After centuries of European and American missions coming to these communities to provide temporary healthcare access, the university proposed a different approach through their socio-health and educational outreach project.

In some of Argentina's most vulnerable cities, 89% of the population experiences some form of unmet basic needs (UBN), such as lack of food, shelter, or medical care, causing high rates of child malnutrition and tuberculosis. The university launched their project to send interdisciplinary specialized medical teams to provide healthcare and professional training to support the development of the local healthcare teams in isolated communities, like Santa Victoria Este, Salta.

“We want to build a community of professionals that could face the healthcare problems based on our own abilities and begin developing the capacities and capabilities of the local professionals.”

JUAN MARCOS DE VERA

One such local professional who has collaborated with the hospital on these missions that provide healthcare to more than 600 individuals each year is Juan Pablo Griso, a hospital nutritionist who has worked in Santa Victoria Este for five years and has received training from the university's team.

In many cases, these visits are the only opportunity people have to access healthcare.



“In Santa Victoria Este, we often need access to updated knowledge, and their support is extremely valuable in strengthening our skills and practices,” said Griso. He also shared that what stands out most about the university’s approach is that it’s “a deeply contextualized form of medicine”. They adapt to the environment, they ask questions, they listen, and they engage.” That kind of collaboration is key because, “the reality [in the community] is very challenging,” he said. “In many cases, these visits are the only opportunity people have to access healthcare.”

BUILDING A WORLD-CLASS SIMULATION-BASED EDUCATION CENTER AT HOME

One of the largest education reform projects the Universidad Hospital Italiano is undertaking is building a large state-of-the-art Simulation-Based Education Center. The first of its kind in Argentina and Latin America, the project seeks to advance the way they teach health sciences.

Through simulation-based training for clinical and surgical skills, including elective and emergency surgery, technical procedures, and clinical consultation, medical students can use physical and virtual learning environments to hone their decision-making skills,

progressively decrease the severity of procedural errors, reduce their execution times by 10-20%, and ultimately save more lives, without risking patients in the process.

“We are responsible for developing this region and the local professionals,” said Dr. Marcelo Fernando Figari, Honorary University Rector and current head and neck surgeon at the Universidad Hospital Italiano. “We have a strong department of surgery that encompasses all of the complex specialties, and they [had to go] to the United States or Europe to [take] courses in simulation labs,” By creating a similar facility, the university aims to keep healthcare talent in the area to benefit local communities and families.

The first phase of the simulation center project will focus on constructing a space dedicated to clinical and surgical simulation. The new space increases the number of courses the university can offer by 80% — they are planning an additional 60 postgraduate courses each year — allowing more than 1,800 healthcare professionals to train in general surgery, traumatology, gastroenterology, ophthalmology, gynecology, urology, and other specialties. Continued fundraising will be essential to ensure this growth in training capacity becomes a lasting reality.

PATIENTS AT THE HEART OF EVERY INITIATIVE

De Vera and Dr. Figari shared that the hospital's patients are at the heart of their fundraising strategy. "For the university, close contact with hospital patients has been and continues to be fundamental, as our health education programs emphasize the importance of this contact from the very beginning of students' studies," said Dr. Figari. "The students we educate are the future professionals who will provide care for new patients."

With the hospital providing over 2 million medical consultations per year, "our patients deeply value the safety and human quality of care they receive and often express their gratitude by staying connected and supporting our initiatives," shared Dr. Figari.

A NEW BRIDGE TO AMERICAN DONORS

One such way the university remains connected to patients is through their new Grateful Patient Program, a recurring individual giving initiative where patients can donate to support their work. The other is via their American Friends Fund at Myriad USA, which provides them with a cost-effective platform to receive contributions from donors in the United States.

"Many of our patients, relatives, and professionals now reside in the United States," said Dr. Figari.

"We are eager to connect with them and open new opportunities for them to support our mission and expand our impact together."

One of the hospital's ongoing fundraising efforts is for their scholarship program. The scholarship provides students tuition funds for their degree, healthcare coverage, and a monthly stipend for additional expenses, such as meals, transportation, books, and other supplies.

One such student is Antonella Luque, a nursing student currently attending the university. "I've always been interested in healthcare in general, but I never really considered nursing," Luque said. After learning about the global nursing shortage, Luque saw the scholarship not only as an avenue of educational advancement, but also to "encourage people to learn about nursing and pursue it, so there can be more professionals to care for patients," she said.

To better train those professionals, the university's largest fundraising endeavor is for Stage 1 of the Simulation-Based Education Center. De Vera and his team are hoping to raise \$2 million for the center, of which they expect about half of the funding to come from international donors.

"The University has always strived to maintain strong ties with its alumni and residents who have pursued their professional careers in the United States and Europe," said Dr. Figari. "It is not only gratifying to see professionals trained at our institution succeed abroad, but also to observe their solidarity with our institution and their desire to give back many times over."

With support from donors near and far, the Universidad Hospital Italiano is proving that world-class healthcare doesn't have to come from somewhere else. It can be built, sustained, and shared right at home.

For more information:

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instituto.hospitalitaliano.org.ar

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