

# Academic League for Occupational Medicine: the experience at Universidade Federal do Paraná

Liga Acadêmica de Medicina do Trabalho:  
a experiência da Universidade Federal do Paraná

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**ABSTRACT** | **Background:** Academic leagues play an essential role at universities. They include extracurricular activities that broaden the scope of the students' knowledge and favor their contact with professionals active in the target field, thus affording opportunities for learning and activities relevant for professional consolidation. **Objectives:** To describe the activities developed by the Academic League for Occupational Medicine, Federal University of Paraná, in 2016. **Methods:** The present was a retrospective, experience-report study on the experiences of League members in 2016. **Results:** During 2016, the League held weekly meetings, and also one monthly meeting with a guest lecturer to discuss a predefined subject. The students participated in the Green April Movement and the Health and Safety at Work and Emergency Fair and Seminar (PREVENSUL) and presented scientific papers at outreach events, seminars and conferences. **Conclusions:** The activities afforded the students opportunities for theoretical and practical learning on occupational medicine, which evidenced its social and academic relevance, agreement with medical education and commitment to the essence of university outreach.

**Keywords** | teaching; education, medical; occupational medicine.

**RESUMO** | **Contexto:** As ligas acadêmicas exercem papel fundamental nas universidades com atividades extracurriculares que expandem o conhecimento dos alunos, além de promover o convívio com profissionais que atuam rotineiramente na área abordada, proporcionando o aprendizado e experiências importantes para a consolidação profissional. **Objetivos:** Descrever as atividades desenvolvidas pela Liga Acadêmica de Medicina do Trabalho da Universidade Federal do Paraná no ano de 2016. **Métodos:** Trata-se de um estudo retrospectivo, tipo relato de experiência vivenciada pelos membros da liga no ano de 2016. **Resultados:** A liga desenvolveu, durante 2016, reuniões semanais, com um encontro mensal onde era convidado um palestrante para discutir um tema pré-agendado, com participação dos alunos no Movimento Abril Verde e na Feira e Seminário de Saúde, Segurança do Trabalho e Emergência (PREVENSUL), apresentação de trabalhos científicos em eventos de extensão, seminários e congressos. **Conclusões:** As atividades proporcionaram aos alunos aprendizados teóricos e práticos sobre a medicina do trabalho, demonstrando sua relevância social e acadêmica, pactuação com a formação médica e compromisso com a essência da extensão universitária.

**Palavras-chave** | ensino; educação médica; medicina do trabalho.

Study performed at Universidade Federal do Paraná - Curitiba (PR), Brazil.

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DOI: 10.5327/Z1679443520180087

## INTRODUCTION

In modern society, work is a factor of social integration relevant to the lives of people. Work, and the conditions under which it is performed, might be considered to be a factor of personal accomplishment, but also a source of illness<sup>1,2</sup>. As a result, safety and health at work are indispensable requirements when the goal is to afford healthy and productive work environments. In a world characterized by daily and increasing technological discoveries and innovations, the divulgation of information on prevention of work accidents and diseases is decisive for the quality of work life.

Occupational medicine emerged in England in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, together with the Industrial Revolution. This concept expanded to other countries, and in 1959, the International Labor Organization (ILO) formulated Recommendation No. 112, entitled Occupational Health Services in Places of Employment<sup>3</sup>. From the notion of occupational health service described by ILO one might infer the following characteristics:

- it is essentially a medical activity performed at the workplace;
- it focuses on the physical and mental adaptation of workers, thus contributing to their allocation to places and tasks suitable to their skills, in addition to adjusting work to workers through the selection of job candidates and educational actions;
- it contributes to the establishment and maintenance of the highest possible levels of physical and mental well-being among workers.

The training of health care professionals should seek the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and practices to enable the future professionals to promote health, prevent disease and deal with the most prevalent local conditions. To accomplish such goals, the 2014 National Curriculum Guidelines for Undergraduate Medical Courses<sup>4</sup> recommended integrating teaching, research and outreach. Didactic activities should stimulate creativity and initiative for self-learning, development of critical spirit and prepare professionals for the constant transformations in and advancement of knowledge in the modern world.

In Brazil, academic leagues are associations of students, including the participation of graduates in medicine and

other fields of knowledge, established to delve deeper into a given field of medicine. For this purpose, the activities of medical leagues follow the so-called “university tripod”: teaching, research and outreach. This model of social action and academic complementation emerged in Brazil in 1918 with the creation of the League for Combat of Syphilis at School of Medicine, University of São Paulo. The students made profit of their learning along the course to establish units in which prophylaxis and treatment were offered gratis to the population<sup>5</sup>.

The leagues resulted in considerable academic growth and development, being supervised by tutors — professors or professionals — affiliated with higher education institutions or teaching hospitals<sup>6,7</sup>. Through participation in outreach projects, students get to identify and understand the connection among teaching, research and outreach, which enhances their comprehension of their professional lives, inasmuch as engagement contributes to their future professional practice.

Improving medical education and adjusting it to the needs of society pose a permanent challenge to medical schools. The Academic League for Occupational Medicine (Liga Acadêmica de Medicina do Trabalho — LIAMT), Federal University of Paraná (Universidade Federal do Paraná — UFPR) was created in 2016 for the purpose of deepening the knowledge obtained along the undergraduate course and create opportunities for students to act as health promotion and social transformation agents in the community. Thus, the scope of the object of medical practice is broadened, by recognizing people in general as actors in the health-disease process. As a result, students are not only afforded an opportunity for scientific development, but also for the exercise of citizenship.

The aim of the present study was to describe the activities performed by UFPR undergraduate medical students through LIAMT in 2016.

## METHODS

The present was a retrospective, experience-report study relative to the experience of LIAMT/UFPR members. LIAMT was created in 2016 in Curitiba, Paraná, by undergraduate medical students at UFPR.

In 2015, students acting as undergraduate teaching assistants in the course on health and work began discussing the role of occupational medicine in the training of general practitioners. They also discussed the relevance of establishing an academic league for occupational medicine to develop their knowledge further and promote broader access to this specialty for students. Soon after they held meetings to decide on the league's aims, target population, methods and activities. By this time, the group included two supervisors (UFPR professors) and four students, who later on became the first members of LIAMT board (president, vice-president, secretary and scientific/outreach director). These positions were democratically filled through the direct vote of all founders, with no difference in representativeness between professors and students. LIAMT statutes were formulated based on the ones of other academic leagues, adapted to its specific aims and objectives. It further complied with the guidelines developed by the Brazilian Association of Medical Academic Leagues (Associação Brasileira de Ligas Acadêmicas de Medicina — ABLAM) for the purpose of affiliation, but also to serve as formal model for academic leagues. The rationale was to avoid LIAMT from becoming just a group of unsupervised students with similar personal demands and specializing in occupational medicine<sup>5</sup>.

An active Internet search performed at that time located just two academic leagues active in Brazil, one in Amazonas (Amazonian League of Occupational Medicine and Legal Medical Examinations/Liga Amazonense de Medicina do Trabalho e Perícias Médicas — LAMT) e and the other in São Paulo (Academic League for Occupational Medicine, School of Medicine, UNINOVE (Liga Acadêmica de Medicina do Trabalho da Faculdade de Medicina da — LIMT).

In regard to ethical issues, since the present study used secondary data in the public domain, there was not need to request clearance by a research ethics committee in accordance with the National Health Council Resolution no. 466/2012 and international ethical guidelines.

## RESULTS

The League started its activities in the first semester of 2016, which consisted of meetings held at the Department of Community Health, Health Division, UFPR. Classes

were open to professors and students independently from their course year, as well as to students from other medical schools in the capital of Paraná. As per the agreed schedule, the League board met every week, and a monthly meeting was held with the participating students. Subjects related to workers' health and the planning of the application of knowledge to community actions were defined as the League's aims. Activities involved lectures, classes and debates in which predefined topics were addressed by a guest lecturer.

The first class at LIAMT took place on 4 April 2016, and was attended by more than 25 students. The topic addressed was "Field of Action of Occupational Medicine," and triggered a discussion on what to be an occupational physician means, how one becomes an occupational physician, what the scope of action of this field is, and what the specific professional skills and competencies are. The following classes were devoted to several subjects which allowed the students to deepen in the concepts learned in the regular courses, and afforded newer students the first contact with this field. These classes were taught by university professors and guest occupational physicians. Several topics were addressed along the eight classes taught in 2016, including residency programs in occupational medicine, the relevance of occupational physicians in present-day society and the mental health of workers, always having workers' health as main focus. Another highly relevant subject, which triggered positive feedback from the students, was work accidents and the correct filling of Work Accident Report (WAR) forms, which was addressed by means of a theoretical-practical approach including clinical cases. The content learned in these classes was analyzed and discussed to plan how to apply it to the community.

With the support of the Occupational Medicine Association of Paraná (Associação Paranaense de Medicina do Trabalho — APAMT) the students participated in the Green April Movement, which took place on April 30<sup>th</sup> at Praça Santos Andrade, in front of UFPR Historical Building. Activities included a walk along XV de Novembro street up to Boca Maldita, in Curitiba. Participants carried banners and placards, distributed folders and booklets and delivered short lectures to the population. The aim was to call the public's attention to the need to avoid hazards in the work environment, as well as to the relevance of practices

to reduce the number of occupational deaths, accidents and diseases. Direct contact was established with the community, which enabled the exchange of information and experiences about the actual conditions of workers, in addition to affording an opportunity to apply the knowledge acquired at the League's activities and the regular university courses to the community.

The students also participated in 19<sup>th</sup> PREVENUSUL (Work Health and Safety and Emergency Fair and Seminar) which took place in Curitiba, Paraná, as a part of Expo Unimed, from August 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>. The program for these three days included courses, seminars and workshops focusing on technical and professional training in this field. Outreach project "Prevention and Promotion of Health and Safety at Work, a Transforming Action" was presented during UFPR 8<sup>th</sup> Teaching, Research and Outreach Integrated Week on October 2016.

Students also participated in the 31<sup>st</sup> Occupational Health Meeting of Paraná, 4<sup>th</sup> Occupational Medicine Congress of Paraná and 2<sup>nd</sup> Ibero-American Workers' Health Meeting. The latter was held in Curitiba from 24 to 26 November 2016, and the League presented three posters, to wit: "Academic League for Occupational Medicine (LIAMT), Federal University of Paraná: A University Outreach Project," "Absenteeism: Causes, Consequences and Preventive Measures" and "Prevention and Promotion of Health and Safety at Work, a Transforming Action."

## DISCUSSION

The overall aim of the academic league is to provide a space for discussion, reflection, critical analysis and education of medical students as concerns the relevance of occupational medicine. It further seeks to complement the learning of undergraduate medical students and to enhance their participation in society through events devoted to prevention and health promotion.

LIAMT developed several activities in the field of occupational medicine, including lectures, meetings and presentation of papers in symposia and conferences. The results evidence that participation in this league contributes to the learning process and affords contact with professionals active in this field, resulting in learning and personal experiences relevant for professional consolidation.

The classes taught as a part of the activities of academic leagues and their content should not be seen as a remedy for eventual flaws in the formal university curriculum. Yet they should complement the activities developed during regular courses and serve as point of departure for continued re-discussion and readjustment of the curriculum as a function of the need to update it<sup>8-10</sup>.

One further reason for the relevance of the league is that it makes students come closer to the notions that ground universities as such: teaching, research and outreach. Particularly the latter, as undergraduate students usually do not have much access to outreach. In this regard, the league afforded opportunities for direct contact with the community, through lectures and events, in which the students could apply the knowledge acquired through the league and in the regular courses into practice, and also had occasion to exchange information with workers.

The league's activities afford students access to subjects of their interest within an environment they themselves build and manage. This allows for substantial learning and experience, development of clinical-scientific reasoning and acquisition of additional knowledge on occupational medicine, while it promotes greater interaction with the community.

## CONCLUSION

During the period addressed, the league succeeded in introducing students to subject occupational medicine by providing more knowledge on and awakening interest in this field through learning and experience, with emphasis on outreach activities.

Therefore, the league affords unique opportunities for extracurricular activities aiming at contributing to the acquisition of knowledge, scientific research and health promotion within the community. When properly oriented, the community significantly contributes to education.

Finally, there is no doubt that academic leagues are beneficial for students, and also for society at large. The reason is that they potentiate the spread of the knowledge acquired by undergraduates students along their professional lives and provide opportunities for theoretical and practical learning. Thus, they evidence their social and academic relevance, agreement with medical education and commitment to the essence of university outreach.

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