



The pandemic arouses interest in studying Medicine in the Valencian Community

Since the covid flooded hospitals and health centers throughout Spain at the beginning of 2020, health professionals were the first to face a hitherto unknown virus. And for this reason his figure has become a symbol of struggle and sacrifice. But beyond the applause on the balconies and the recognition that has been given to them throughout the evolution of the pandemic, lies the enormous psychological and professional exhaustion, popularly known as burnout, caused by the intense working hours in a context of chaos and uncertainty.

However, far from sowing fear among students who aspired to start careers such as Medicine or Nursing in the year of the pandemic, this situation was the engine that prompted many of them to enroll in these degrees. The desire to be able to practice the profession one day overcame any hint of indecision, at a time when health sector personnel "was needed more than ever."

Requests for the 2020-2021 academic year exceeded by 40.2% those of the year before the virus

This is how Judit Villanueva, who entered Medicine in September 2020 at the Universitat Jaume I (UJI) in Castellón, explains it to this newspaper. Despite the fact that she had just completed an atypical Baccalaureate and a selectivity that was postponed to July due to health circumstances, this 19-year-old did not hesitate to make the decision: "When I saw what was happening I thought: I wish I was in the sixth year of Medicine, I had more knowledge and they asked me for

help in a hospital". "I would have liked to experience it despite the fact that it would have involved suffering, especially for my family," she adds.

Judit's case is not isolated: more than 5,000 students submitted their application to study Medicine at one of the three public universities that offer the degree in the Valencian Community, that is, the University of Valencia (UV), the Miguel Hernández (UMH) of Elche and the UJI.

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Judit Villanueva, Medicine student at the Jaume I University (UJI)

The total number of requests for the 2020-2021 academic period exceeded the sum of the year before the virus by 40.2%. This course (2021-2022), the demand has continued to rise, reaching 5,975 applications, according to data from the Department of Universities.

However, the most striking fact about this course is the increase in applications to enter Nursing. Although in the year of the pandemic there was already a growth of 22.9%, this year it has been 31.3%. A total of 3,333 young people sent their application to study this career offered in the public sphere at the University of Alicante (UA), the UJI and the UV.

Beyond the figures: the reason for the interest in health professions

How has the pandemic influenced the decision of students interested in the health branch? Three young Valencians who entered Medicine and Nursing in the year of covid reflect on how the virus has changed their vision of these professions. Judit, Carles and Laura agree that seeing health personnel on the front line in the hardest moments of the spread of the disease reaffirmed that "hunch" they had when choosing.

Villanueva assures that if any friend of hers had had doubts at that time about whether to study Medicine for fear of the pandemic, "I would tell her that it was not an impediment." Although this does not imply that he did not hesitate on occasion before choosing. "Many upperclassmen could not do internships due to covid. That made me reflect because I was terrified to enter a

health career at a time when internships could not be done, for fear of being able to leave university without the necessary experience, "she determines.



Medical students observing an operation in the operating room

GVA

Her classmate at UJI, Laura Collado, experienced firsthand the effects that the crisis has had on health personnel, given that she has doctors in her family. And, despite this, she was clear that she wanted to practice the profession. But she acknowledges that she began a "so demanding" career that same year and with "the uncertainty of not knowing what she was going to go through," in some way she "affected her at the time of studying in high school and selectivity." "But I have never regretted the decision I made," she stresses.

For his part, Carles Andrés, who is studying at the UV to be a nurse, says that he will begin his internship next March at the La Fe de València hospital. The 19-year-old expresses his frustration because he will not be able to access some floors of the hospital where the specialties are, given the presence of the virus. Still, he is proud to be able to start using his knowledge in a field that, as he explains, he has always wanted to work in.

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Carles Andrés, Nursing student at the UV

The university student assures that starting his studies in this context changed his conception of the profession: "The first thing I thought when I found out that there was a pandemic was that the figure of the nurse is not sufficiently valued," he explains. Although he considers that with the health crisis "people realized the work that these professionals do", he warns that memory "is very short". That is why he fears that, when the pandemic situation returns to normal, "that visibility and recognition that they have had will decrease again."

But Collado disagrees in this sense: "I think that recognition can last for a certain time. But as in all professions, it will have its ups and downs; I don't see it with fear". "Honestly, personal satisfaction is internal, it is not necessary for someone to recognize my work," he says. Even so, he agrees that, at a social level, health professions "are valued more" since the start of the pandemic, but he regrets that this has had to reach "this extreme situation."

Finishing a health career in the midst of a pandemic

Those who entered university that year had the opportunity to decide whether to study a health career in the middle of a pandemic. But students who graduated at the start of the covid crisis suddenly found themselves at a crossroads, given that they had no choice. Teresa Piqueras and Belén Císcar, 22, are two Valencian nurses who finished their studies in the 2020-2021 academic year at the University of Valencia (UV). Both already work in the emergency services of two Valencian hospitals.

Looking back, they were in third when the Government decreed the state of alarm in March 2020, so they could not practice that course. "We thought that we would leave the race without having practiced and in a much tougher situation than in a normal context without viruses," says Piqueras.



Health personnel attend to a patient in the Intensive Care Unit of the Hospital La Fé de València

EFE

His colleague speaks of the feeling of “impotence” generated by “being at home knowing that there were staff who were exhausted”. “It was frustrating to have knowledge and not be able to be there,” she explains. Finally, they were able to do the fourth-year internships and, although the students were not supposed to attend to covid patients, they did experience first-hand the pressure that Valencian health was experiencing at the end of 2020, then hit by one of the most severe waves of the pandemic. .

Now, they see their profession with another perspective. “As a nurse I feel more valued today than two years ago; we need more than society believes and I think it has been good to remind people, I don’t know what will happen when this is over and they dispense with the covid reinforcements, because even so we still have a lot of work,” warns Císcar. .

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Belén Císcar, a nurse who finished her degree in a pandemic

Guillermo Renau, a 27-year-old doctor from Valencia who studied at the UV, shares with these two young women the experience of having entered the world of work in contact with the pandemic from the outset. Since he passed the MIR exam at the beginning of 2020, just after

the spread of the virus, he has been working as a surgical resident at the Hospital Universitari Sant Joan de Reus, in Catalonia.

But, unlike Piqueras and Císcar, he thinks that the pandemic has not changed the conception that exists about health personnel: "I think there is no significant change because the evaluation of the effort was at that specific moment, but then it is forgotten and it seems like natural behavior. I don't see it as a lack of gratitude on the part of society," he points out.