

Surgical decentralization: A sanitary act of justice in Paraguay

La descentralización quirúrgica: Un acto de justicia sanitaria en el Paraguay

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For decades, access to more complex surgical procedures in Paraguay was heavily concentrated in Asunción and the Central Department. This reality forced numerous patients from the interior of the country to face, in addition to their illness, uprooting, the costs of travel, separation from their families, and the overload of referral centers. Today, however, the country is undergoing a process of transformation that deserves to be recognized, strengthened, and supported by all academic and scientific spheres.

Surgical decentralization does not consist solely of relocating equipment or holding occasional surgical sessions in the various departments. Its true meaning lies in the consolidation of local capacities, in the training of stable teams, and in the decision of highly trained professionals to develop their practice in their own communities, thereby contributing to transforming the health reality of their surroundings. In that context, recent experiences such as the performance of complex surgeries at the Hospital General de Coronel Oviedo and the consolidation of the Hospital General de Itapúa as a surgical reference hub constitute concrete signs of an encouraging and necessary process. Added to this is the existence of projects to build new hospitals of high complexity in the interior of the country, which reflects an increasingly clear orientation toward strengthening the problem solving capacity of health services outside the metropolitan area and toward a more equitable distribution of specialized surgical care.

This progress, without a doubt, opens a new stage for Paraguayan surgery and poses challenges that, as a scientific society, we must accompany with strategic vision.

First, it is essential to strengthen continuous training and the retention of human talent in the surgical services of the interior. Decentralization will be truly sustainable if it is accompanied by opportunities for professional development, ongoing updates, and adequate conditions so that specialists can grow and project

themselves in their own healthcare centers.

Secondly, it is essential to consolidate an articulated national surgical network, in which the different hospitals do not function as isolated entities but as interconnected nodes. Timely referral, efficient counter referral, and cooperation among teams will allow resources to be optimized, outcomes to be improved, and more integrated care to be guaranteed for patients.

Thirdly, telemedicine and academic support networks today represent strategic tools for strengthening this decentralization. The possibility of discussing complex cases, sharing experiences, holding virtual clinical meetings, and accessing specialized second opinions reduces professional isolation and fosters a more collaborative and up to date surgical practice.

Finally, this process must be accompanied by scientific production. The experiences developed in regional hospitals must be documented, systematized, and published. Only in this way will it be possible to generate national evidence, make the progress achieved visible, and provide academic support for public policies aimed at expanding equitable access to surgical care.

From this journal, we urge colleagues from all departments of the country to record and communicate their achievements, challenges, and lessons learned. The construction of a more equitable Paraguayan surgery does not depend solely on infrastructure or equipment, but also on the ability to transform care experience into shared knowledge.

The decentralization of surgery in Paraguay is no longer a distant aspiration. It is a growing reality, palpable in regional operating rooms and in the commitment of those who work every day to bring concrete solutions closer to the population. In essence, decentralizing surgery is delivering health justice: bringing care to the place where the patient needs it, instead of forcing the patient to seek it far from their reality.

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