Health obligation or health fascism

José Luis Sandoval-Gutiérrez

Department of Pulmonology, Instituto Nacional de Enfermedades Respiratorias Ismael Cosío Villegas, Mexico City, Mexico

Dr. Lifshitz¹ presents an interesting editorial about a campaign in a region of Italy that claimed that health should be mandatory and that anyone not obeying this would receive the death penalty. This claim, which to begin with is rather amusing, perhaps shows the desperation of a health system that finds itself surpassed in budgetary terms by the increase in life expectancy and therefore in the occurrence of chronic degenerative diseases in the population.

Since decades ago, medical training stresses on the importance of prevention as the most efficacious measure for health preservation in a community, but, paradoxically, it is the curative form of medicine that is most taught in schools and studied in specialties.

As doctors, we are convinced that health is the human being's greatest treasure, and thus let us patients know when they are sick and want prompt recovery of their ailments. When this occurs, we ask ourselves: why does the patient not attend his/her medical appointments? Why does he/she not take the medications? Why doesn't he/she follow suggested measures? And perhaps the ultimate answer will be because that's the way the human race is.

Generally, no individual wants to be sick, not even in his/her thoughts; denying reality or the possibility of suffering from some ailment makes for the conditions for having a healthy status to be evaded. There is a state of mind associated with the search for wellbeing that is mistaken with the satisfaction or pleasure certain situations can provide: smoking, drinking,

sedentary life, extreme situations in transportation, unprotected sex, drug addictions, etc.

Our ancestors showed-off their not attending doctors as a situation of good health. People is currently more informed, but as the editorial pertinently comments, it is not necessarily more educated; now, attending the doctor with certain periodicity is bragged about, but doctor visits is not synonymous with following his/her recommendations.

Free will, traditionally regarded as a value from the religious, humanistic and legal points of view, unfortunately goes beyond the field of health, and the patient considers that he/she has the right to resort to the health system when he/she considers it necessary and to follow indications he/she finds it appropriate. The above situations would be the highest expression of freedom in a modern society, but from the public health point of view, they are a tragedy.

There are several examples across medical history of the State forcing its population to take certain mandatory-nature public health measures (Cuba, the former USSR, etc.), but the sound individual responsibility for one's own health, without the need for penalization involved, will always be preferable and desirable from the ethical and bioethical points of view.

References

1. Lifshitz A. Health is obligatory. *Gac Med Mex.* 2016;152:149-50.

Correspondence:

José Luis Sandoval-Gutiérrez

Servicio de Neumología, Instituto Nacional de
Enfermedades Respiratorias Ismael Cosío Villegas
Ciudad de México, México
E-mail: sandovalgutierrez@gmail.com

Date of reception: 11-02-2017

Date of acceptance: 01-06-2017

DOI://dx.doi.org/10.24875/GMM.M18000058

Gac Med Mex. 2017;153:628-628

Contents available at PubMed
www.gacetamedicademexico.com