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Introduction

The University Vision Centre (UVC) is the visual health clinic of Terrassa School of Optics and Optometry (TSOO) of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC), where students perform their BSc and MSc clinical practices.

Since 1993, the UVC has attended more than 25,000 patients, half of them being citizens with low incomes, referred from social services. These patients are attended within the framework of clinical practices, supervised by academic staff. If patients are in need of glasses, they are supplied thanks to partnership with the optical industry, which provides frames, ophthalmic and contact lenses, when needed.

Human and educational values in service learning projects

In a healthcare profession, the training process must be connected to the real environment of society, thus the educational process must go beyond the classroom. In this context, service learning is a key tool in health education, allowing students to learn while providing a direct service to society.

A way for students to experience real live situations and learn from their own experience is participating in social projects directly linked to their future profession. To see the result of their action during the learning period makes them grow as citizens and as future professionals. In addition, experience-based training, affects more effectively in the acquisition of skills: learning by doing.

In the service learning process, not only the knowledge acquired through optics and optometry studies are consolidated, but also all the transversal competences and personal skills: empathy, critical spirit, civic attitudes, participation, tolerance, professionalism or work oriented towards the common good.

Innovation

❖ A model based on a framework of public-private collaboration at service of economically vulnerable citizens.
❖ Students, supervised by academic staff, entirely treat the patient directly, assuming full responsibility.
❖ Active sensitization of the students towards the social situation: training future responsible professionals.
❖ More than 2,000 patients attended per year: a wide variety of patients regarding age and visual problems.
❖ The commitment of the collaborative companies: delivering glasses to patients is a key point for this project to be successful.
❖ The support of the Social Services identifying users in need of the service

Conclusions

❖ The assistance and teaching model carried out at the UVC, based on learning service, involving the administration, the university, third sector entities and the business network, is pioneer in Europe.
❖ This project provides a way of training optometrists as responsible healthcare professionals committed and capable of living in society, building active citizenship from the public university.

This project has been awarded by
❖ 20th award to University teaching quality by UPC Social Council (2017)
❖ 2017 Vicens Vives Award to University teaching quality by Catalan Government