
Cuban Medicine: A Commitment That Transcends Borders

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Cuba's participation in international medical collaboration has left a profound mark on thousands of healthcare professionals, tens of thousands of their family members, and, of course, on hundreds of thousands of patients in nations across the world. Over the past six decades, these individuals have witnessed the altruism of Cuban physicians.

The beginnings of the Caribbean nation's international medical collaboration date back to the Algerian experience, starting in May 1963. The newly established Revolutionary Government placed such importance on the commitment made with the authorities of Algeria that it sent the then-Minister of Health, José Ramón Machado Ventura, to lead the contingent of health workers who flew across the Atlantic Ocean to reach the northern African nation.

Since then, countless men and women of medicine have brought their knowledge and dedication to the most unimaginable places on the globe. They have assisted patients in war zones, as occurred during the military campaigns of the *Greater of the Antilles* in Africa; in situations of natural disasters, exemplified by the arrival of health workers in Pakistan following the 2005 earthquake; in countries with high levels of political and social conflict, like Haiti; and in the midst of epidemics, such as Ebola and, more recently, Covid-19.

Even though some healthcare systems are well-structured and funded, the role of Cuban physicians in the cooperation programs they have participated in has been fundamental. This was the case, for example, in Brazil between 2013 and 2018. The Cuban Ministry of Health joined a tripartite agreement with the government of the *South American Giant* and the Pan American Health Organization, eventually contributing the largest share of professionals to the program called *More Doctors for Brazil*.

During those years, the Cuban collaborators worked in areas that not even native professionals were willing to cover. Generally, they were assigned to regions with lower cultural and infrastructural development and higher rates of inadequate healthcare. They brought their knowledge to Amazonian villages, favelas, and remote communities. For certain populations, the doctors from the *Island* constituted their first contact with Western

medicine.

When analyzing the trajectory of the Cuban medical presence abroad, reducing the motivation of the professionals and health authorities to economic reasons is inappropriate. The Island's government has not hidden that the export of medical services, legitimate moreover, is one of the country's sources of foreign currency revenue. However, history demonstrates that the Cuban medical missions have not been a simple commercial transaction, but have been fundamentally linked to conceptions of altruism and solidarity. *The personal sacrifice assumed by Cuban physicians when they decide to offer their services abroad reveals an ethical and humanist commitment that transcends any material calculation.*

Cuban medical collaboration, beyond any specific program or modality, continues to be an expression of a policy centered on the human being. In every mission, in every consultation, in every gesture of care, *Cuba's commitment to health as a right and to human development as a shared horizon* is reaffirmed.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque / CubaSÍ Translation Staff
