

## CHAPTER 8

# DISTANCE LEARNING FOR THE HEALTH AREA

*Distance Education as a Strategic  
Element for the Consolidation of Public Health  
Policies Foundation – Brazil*

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### 8.1 Introduction

The health sector has proven to be quite productive in the area of public policy propositions, especially regarding those related with the redesign of the health care model aiming at a model that meets social demands.

The Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública Sérgio Arouca (ENSP) [National Public Health School Sérgio Arouca] is a Technical-Scientific Unit of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation – Fiocruz of Post-Graduation Studies in Health, belonging to the Ministry of Health (MH), having as one of its main objectives the education of professionals for the Sistema Único de Saúde Brasileiro – SUS [Brazilian unified Health System] in national scope.

SUS is undoubtedly the best designed and has the most successful Brazilian public policies in the last decades due to its commitment with impartiality, ideal of holistic health care, model of participative management, sanitary development and social inclusion. SUS is structured for basic care, a gateway in the system up to the highest complexity services. Health care stations and centers, hospitals – including university hospitals – laboratories, hemocenters, foundations and research institutes are all part of SUS (Barilli, 2005).

Throughout its difficult trajectory in consolidating these precepts, SUS has faced institutional structures still dominated by outdated paradigms determining the perception of health care work and public responsibility over health care. In particular, the area of professional development has been lacking some sort of renewal to turn it into a more effective space of innovation and drive to sanitary reform.

ENSP has been the historical *locus* of the promotion of guiding principles for sanitary movements. In its 52 years of existence, it has established a significant contingent of health care professionals and managers, allying its expertise in the fields of Education, Research and Cooperation in Public Health. It has contributed to the development of personnel, preparation of public policies and played an important role on the promotion of citizenship and improvement of life and health conditions for the population.

## 8.2 ENSP/Fiocruz's Experience in Remote Education

### 8.2.1 Educating for changes

The Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) has the mission to “generate, absorb and disseminate scientific and technological knowledge in health care through the integrated development of research and technological development activities, teaching, asset production, rendering of reference and information services, aiming at providing strategic support to SUS and contributing for the improvement of life quality of the population and for the full exercise of citizenship.”

The health area, in the last decades, has been producing innovating movements in caring and in the professional education areas of health workers, so as to bring them closer to the social needs of the health area and to the consolidation of SUS. In the area of education, the Ministry of Health has been developing a specific policy of education for SUS, in order to bring together the health care system and the developing institutions.

The Distance Education (EAD) of ENSP/Fiocruz emerges in 1998, not included in the strategic initiative of education and qualification in health as a result of the Ministry of Health demand for the remote education of health managers. Since then, EAD/ENSP has been consisting of a strategic program for the development of health care professionals, addressed to professionals and institutions involved in the management of health care services and management systems, providing education opportunities to the professionals in such a way that it may be integrated to the work process. It operates both in the area of *lato sensu* (upper level) post-graduate area and in the professional building area (intermediate level).

### 8.2.2 Political-pedagogical referential

The world of health care work proposes new qualification parameters, configuring the so-called competences or “new competences,” which gather the many pieces of information required to meet quality and productivity requirements. This context demands of the educational systems ongoing education on the job, strengthening the growth of the “competences” specific to health care work.

Considering education as a process capable of developing competences so that the subjects can become more autonomous, with enhanced inventive capability, this type of education requires a curriculum in which education provides the student with critical observation regarding his professional practice and his co-responsibility in face of changes and/or permanence of the organizational service and health production processes.

The choice of competence as a referential for the professional in his performance area must be expressed in EAD courses as the ability of the health care workers to exercise their practice with the potential to create. The definition of competence occurs in an arena of conflicts of interest, of ideological and power disputes.

The adopted competence approach recognizes the background of the subjects, their attributes and their knowledge to perform actions that will guide the intent of educational processes.

A major challenge is to provide for the perspectives of the different players and to allow dialogue to establish consensus.

The courses in EAD envisage developing a curriculum integrated to the health system and to the work process, in which the student may also be able to be aware of the professional problems, criticizing the education and the reality experienced. This will allow the professional to, as of his routines and experience, become motivated to study and research at the same time he is absorbed in the intervention processes on the job. The integration between the world of work and that of learning is expressed both in the dialog and agreed processes and requires theoretical-practical articulation among educational institutions and services, among the different areas of knowledge, with different professionals.

The courses are oriented by competence and their reference is the constructivist conception of the teaching-learning process, in the significant learning and in the use of active learning methodologies, which can be expressed in the diversity of their proposals with totally remote processes or further with the interaction on face to face occasions. The emphasis is to build theoretical and methodological grounding that may provide the students with tools and qualify them to interfere in the complex problems in their routine work in search of solutions.

The **educational material**, the core of the process, is organized to favor the development of the students' actions and attributes, to permit reflection on the action and the flexibility of a set of knowledge. It uses different resources (problem situations, case reports, cases, basic texts, complementary texts, activities, videos, CD-ROMs). Therefore, the material differs from the traditional format in which the contents are previously selected and transmitted to the students. One seeks, from the subject's experiences and his reality, to bring about the theory in a dialogue format, with problem-solving, enabling the customization of the studies and, at the same time, their articulation with the world of work in its political, social and technical dimensions. This orientation redefines the role of the student and the tutor, in the space of knowledge mediation in the teaching-learning process, a dimension that makes it possible for the professional to be constantly learning.

Although there is emphasis on the student's individualized education, the role of the professor (called **tutor**) is fundamental as mediator in the pedagogic relation and as facilitator in the process among the other players. There is a language proper for this process; it is challenged and it challenges new practices that allows new forms of dialogue to ensure the results expected.

The tutor in this perspective is permanently learning, supported by the idea of a critical, creative and reflexive exercise that it develops in different space, time and context. Knowing-doing tutorship is in constant renewal, making it more qualified.

The **evaluation** is a component that cannot be dissociated from the political-pedagogic project. One intends to create opportunities to learn from practice, through punctual action, in collective negotiations, in the effectiveness of permanent education. The evaluation process aims at understanding what goes on inside the services, brought by the students, so that the players can analyze this reality from a deeper perspective.

### 8.2.3 System of student/professional follow-up

The qualification programs in the distance remote education program are developed in interactive environments that allow the active participation of all participants in equal conditions, structured to enable the student to establish his own trajectory, building his own study plan.

The evaluation is mainly educative, which focus on the development process of the student in his competence profile, including the analysis of his participation and the construction of new capabilities. The student relies on structured follow-up systems, consisting of tutors, advisors, coordinators and academic management.

**Tutors** Professionals with teaching experience in the health care and education fields. They act as learning facilitators, alert to possible interactions with and between the students stimulating them and providing them with a receptive environment to the construction of knowledge. Their role is critical to assure an environment favorable to learning.

Each tutor is responsible for following-up a group, making up a collective whole with this group. He builds a more effective relationship with the student and with the others for the purpose of shared tasks. He is constantly motivating his student in his learning process, helping him to organize his objectives, analyze themes, and contribute to solutions for proposed activities.

The tutors of the courses are selected criteria according to previously defined by EAD/ENSP/Fiocruz. After that, they participate in an initial education course at EAD where they discuss the EAD/ENSP's theories-concepts, validate the educational material acting as "co-authors" and are qualified to use the virtual learning environment tools. During the development of the course, they participate in a process of permanent learning by means of follow-up on the part of their advisor.

**Advisors** The learning advisors follow up the trajectory of the tutor in his permanent learning during the development of the course. He establishes the new objectives of the tutorship practice in relation to values, emotions, competences, propositions. He mediates the interaction of the group of tutors under his responsibility with the course coordination.

He goes through a process of selection, with qualification in the areas of health and education. He follows the performance reports of the students, by means of the tutor, analyzes the group situation of each class. He participates in the course coordination and the pedagogic coordination of EAD/ENSP in the development of technologies and methodologies that may contribute to ensure the quality of the remote courses held by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation.

**Academic Management** Academic Management is an instance of EAD/ENSP responsible for the follow-up and evaluation of educational processes developed by this institution. It also participates in the planning and execution of the selective processes of the courses (students, tutors, advisors).

The regulation used for purposes of academic education in the courses abides by the general Brazilian rules of *lato sensu* post-graduation of the ENSP, institution responsible for the issuance of completion certificates of the course and entitlement. The approval is tied to the achievement of a satisfactory concept in the analysis of the process and results, which corresponds to concepts A, B, C; failure corresponds to concept D. There are courses that envisage professional students from the intermediate level. In this case, the students are certified by the Escola Joaquim Venâncio, of Fiocruz.

**Coordinations** General coordination follows the development of the educational process with the purpose of ensuring the quality of the education program offered to the student.

The pedagogic coordination relies on a staff responsible for the conception of the project and development of the courses, in their phases of preparation of educational material, setting up of tutors, implementation and follow-up of the courses. The course coordination administers, with the other coordinators, the conception and the development of the political-pedagogic proposal, the schedules, administrative follow-up, and students' certification.

#### 8.2.4 Technical body

Today, EAD/ENSP intellectual capital consists of 30 doctors, 73 masters and 5 specialists, who compose the staffs of planning, development, teaching follow-up and coordination of the courses. It also relies on 60 additional professionals distributed in the following organizational areas: Academic Management, Administrative and Financial Management, Computer and Design, and Pedagogic Coordination.

#### 8.2.5 Scenario of EAD courses

At the present time, EAD/ENSP has about 35 thousand enrolled students, more than 15,000 graduated students, 11,910 active professionals, about 1,600 tutors and many courses under in preparation. It offers *lato sensu* post-graduate courses for improvement and updating. These are divided into: 1) Regular Courses (available to all health care workers) and 2) Courses to meet specific demands or requirements, called Institutional Demands.

### 8.3 EAD as a Strategic Element for the Implementation and Consolidation of Health Care Public Policies

EAD/ENSP/Fiocruz consists of a strategic option for the qualification of professionals and its purpose is to enhance the mission of ENSP in developing workers capable of meeting the requirements imposed by the decentralization and municipalization processes of health care actions, resulting from the implementation of the SUS.<sup>1</sup>

The articulation between the workers' education in the health care sector and the several governmental instances is considered, in the present national reality, very critical in view of the need to promote the decision-making capacity in the health care and education development services.

In the last few years, EAD/ENSP/Fiocruz has collaborated with the Ministry of Health by means of this modality, in its implementation action, its coverage and in the consolidation of SUS policies, since this modality permits the development of a higher-reaching development process.

The first experience in this regard took place in 2005 with the construction and implementation of the Programa de Formação de Facilitadores de Educação Permanente em Saúde (Program for the Education of Continuing Education Facilitators in the Health Care Area) held in partnership with Ministry of Health – MS.

At this time, SGTES/DGES/MS was developing a wide process of implementation of the Policy for the Continuing Education of the Health Care Professionals at SUS. The

1 Unified Health System.

Policy for the Continuing Education is a strategy prepared and implemented by the Ministry of Health, and an important instrument to foster changes in the model of development of the SUS and drive full attention to the health sector, favoring the intersectorial articulation and having as central focus the needs of the users. The core of the Policy of Continuing Education in the Health Care Area is to enhance changes in the work processes, enhancing the professional practices and the work organization regarding problems related to practical issues, identifying the critical knots that surround the different players of this process, from users to managers.

Therefore, this Program has the objective of developing several players related to the health care sector, aiming at the expansion of the capability of implementation of processes of Continuing Education in the Health Care System, strengthening the EP (Permanent Education) Poles and the Policy for the Development of Health Professionals of the Ministry of Health (Fiocruz, 2005). This action was identified as an important strategy as a result of the diversity of the social players involved and of the processes that it establishes, seeking to assure inter-institutional articulation spaces, develop the understanding and the operationalism as well as involve the highest possible number of people with the proposal of Continuing or Permanent Learning. Therefore, it intends to subsidize the actions of the facilitators (Program students) in the challenge to implement, strengthen and consolidate the political-pedagogic proposal of permanent education in each local region. The challenge to be taken is that of actively participating in the promotion and articulation between sector workers' education, the decision-making capability of the health care services and the development of popular education for a more humanized SUS.

This Program started in 2005 and at the present time has around 6,000 students. The goal is to constitute a contingent of 12,000 people to act as Permanent Education Facilitators in the Health Care area to strengthen this policy.

After this first requirement, which inaugurated the action of EAD/ENSP/Fiocruz, by means of the development of a remote education process, in the implementation, strengthening and consolidation of a public policy in health, other requirements followed from the Ministry of Health, confirming the potential of this modality and of the education processes as strategical elements of transformation. At present, three more courses under this particular focus are under way and two courses are being designed at EAD/ENSP/Fiocruz.

The three courses in progress are: Activation of the Processes of Change in the Higher Education of the Health Care Professionals, Management of Health Investment Projects, and Education of Supporters for the National Policy of Humanization of Health Care and Management.

The course of *Activation of Processes of Change in the Higher Education of Health Care Professionals* aims at developing specialists capable of unleashing and expanding critical thinking and strategical action to disseminate and optimize the processes of change in the higher education of health care professionals in the country.

The MS has been developing a specific policy for SUS education, to enable important approximations between the health care system and the establishing institutions. AprenderSUS is a set of strategies proposed to enable and strengthen relationships of cooperation between education institutions and the health care system. The strategy for the expansion of critical thinking in health graduation aims at mobilizing people for the elaboration and promotion of changes and to transform their practices, thus, requiring, the education and the engagement of teachers, workers, students, managers and social move-

ments in this process (Fiocruz, 2006). For this purpose, the Ministry of Health has made possible a partnership between ENSP/Fiocruz and the Rede Unida (United Network) to provide the above mentioned course which is under completion and should be finished with some 900 professionals.

The course of *Management of Health Care Investment Projects* consists of one of the actions of the Qualification Program in Incorporation of Technologies at the SUS Network. Such an initiative has as strategy the change in paradigm in the implementation of investment policies, based on the needs and the strengthening of SUS management, especially in this area, with the development of regional parameters for the management of physical and technological resources in health, consolidating the implementation of technical cooperation actions of the Ministry of Health in the investment area.

The structure and implementation of this course was oriented toward the education of 950 managing technicians as a first action of this Program, since, in a general way, the Management of Investment Projects in Brazil has taken place without the due professional capability specific for such an enterprise. As a result, we see investments in projects without sustainability guarantees or not too efficient. The course is based on a continuous process of articulation between the contents and the dynamics inherent to the educational process and the reality of the student, and the conquests and difficulties of the teams at the units and instances involved, having as one of the final objectives, the design of preliminary projects of investments that are relevant and sustainable (Fiocruz, 2006). Currently, this course is in progress.

The most recent process is the course of *Education of Supporters for the National Policy for Health Care and Management Humanization*. This course is included in the perspective of qualifying and optimizing actions and strategies of the Política Nacional de Humanização (PNH) (National Humanization Policy), which, from the second semester of 2005, takes on a new drive, presenting itself as a priority action on the Agenda of Commitments of the Ministry of Health management (Ministry of Health, 2005), because it is seen as a transversal policy capable of improving the access, the responsiveness and the quality of the services rendered at SUS, among others. This way, this course makes official a partnership of technical cooperation among the Ministry of Health/SAS/PNH, Universidade Federal Fluminense-UFF and EAD/ENSP/Fiocruz aiming at the institutional support in health care services with the purpose of Health and Management Humanization. The proposal is to develop supporters of the PNH, people endowed with the ability to trigger, foster and consolidate processes of changes in the management and in the health care processes (Fiocruz, 2006). Initially, the aim is to develop 140 supporters expected to conclude the course in December of 2006.

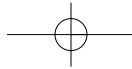
These processes show that the current demands in SUS education have led EAD/ENSP to prepare, together with the Ministry of Health, proposals strategic development for the implementation of health care policies since, in addition to enabling the incorporation of the work process to the pedagogic process, it gives a change of access to pedagogic methodologies mediated by information and communication technology and makes it feasible the simultaneous development of a large number of health care workers in the country. At present, in the area of health care, we have a contingent of the order of approximately two million professionals.

This challenging scenario has promoted the development of the following innovations:

- The adoption of the Remote Education modality as a governmental strategy, aiming at the consolidation of public policies in the health care sector by means of educational processes, which places EAD/ENSP as a strategic institutional *locus* and one of great impact on the models of development in the health care area acting as agent of change in these models (Dupret, 2005).
- Use of the Permanent Education concept, seeking to optimize changes in the work processes, which represent problems in issues derived from the routine work.
- Methodology of courses development based on collective design and, specifically for the preparation of educational material, placing EAD/ENSP with the status of co-author of the course design processes, fostering the establishment of institutional partnerships.
- Development of scientific research – because it integrates professionals with academic background and inclusion in an institution of excellence. At present, two doctor's theses and one paper are in development, which themes involving the EAD/ENSP expertise.
- Development of a Program for the Permanent Formation of Tutors, considering that tutorship/guidance is essential in a remote education process. It is fundamental so that the absence of physical spaces does not represent hindrance to the effectiveness of the learning relationship. We understand the role of the tutor to be one of the pillars for the success of a remote course. He is responsible for stimulating critical thinking presenting problematic issues, performing a central role on the mediation between the didactic material provided by the course and the concrete context in which the student develops his knowledge building. For such a purpose, it is required that the professor is trained and prepared to take on new postures and activities in a mediated process.
- Use of a platform that allows, in addition to bilateral communication between a student and his tutor, the communication of the tutor with all the students at the same time, and among the students themselves.
- The adoption of an innovating pedagogic model, which places the professional-student in the core of the teaching-learning process, as a player of a knowing-doing act in health, recognizing the collective processes as basic in the constitution of their practice. To this effect, the building elements of this process are grounded and articulated among themselves in favor of this model (educational material, Virtual Learning Environment, system of courses follow-up and academic management).

It is possible to see that the experiences of Remote Education that this institution has been granted have been motivated and it is a motivator of reflections and productions and confirm the pertinence of an “elastic” conception of EAD, which, in essence, is an educational process with all the political, pedagogic and social implications inherent to a public asset.





The conceptual emphasis envisages to fall on the ability and the interactions between teachers and students, students and students, students and teachers with the world, favored in the educational process that use communication and information technologies to effectively materialize the required mediations within the reach of educational objectives, meeting the different needs of inclusion and participation.

In the present days, the processes of work and the process of knowledge production and socialization, the relations established between education and work, and the ways of local regional and world integration configure and are configured by new space and time dimensions. Therefore, remote education is not only an alternative to the face to face education, but a unique educational process – which makes it, under many circumstances, even public ones, a means for social inclusion and regional development, envisaging universalization of public assets, such as work, education and health. It can be concluded that this type of inclusion and use of the remote modality in health care has been presenting itself as one of the major innovations in the EAD field.

## 8.4 Contributions and Perspectives

The EAD/ENSP, during its short life, has accumulated experience that can be translated into the following contributions:

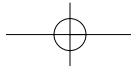
- Advance in efficiency (cost-effectiveness scale) and in on-the-job training;
- Use of a pedagogic model centered on the learning subject;
- Autonomous subject-apprentice in the teaching-learning process;
- Autonomous subject in the professional organization.

In spite of the advances accomplished, EAD/ENSP, however, takes into consideration the following challenges:

- The change in paradigm in the conception of teaching-learning both of the tutor and the professional-student, which implies the exercise of an active role in the pedagogic process;
- The evaluation of the impact of the educational process on the health care services;
- The provision of visibility to the incorporation of subjectivity of the subjects involved in the process.

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