

## Cuban health diplomacy: Focused on international cooperation. A comment on Chattu *et al.*

Sir,

Global health diplomacy has acquired a particular connotation over the recent decades, spurred by its more prominence and priority on the international agenda. Authors like Kickbusch *et al.* have defined the term as: “Multi-level, multi-actor negotiation processes that shape and manage the global policy environment for health.”<sup>[1]</sup> Others, in turn, defined it as: “Health diplomacy is a means of self-preservation in an increasingly interconnected global community... The tools of health diplomacy also can increase the so-called “smart power” of the United States abroad...” or it is also used for activities from formal negotiations to a vast array of partnerships and interactions between governmental and nongovernmental actors.<sup>[2]</sup> Likewise, health programs have been sized as an investment in security, not as an international good deed. The study by Chattu *et al.* refers to one possible angle of Cuban medical diplomacy.<sup>[3]</sup> However, I find some concern because it does not reflect the appropriate scope of the Cuban health diplomacy. In the current context, the importance of the Cuban health diplomacy approach is on addressing a broader number of health determinants based on a profoundly ethical and humanistic concept, guided by the principle of International solidarity of the Cuban National Health System and not as a vehicle to spread a political doctrine, a business relationship, or service sale.

Cuba has been a global leader in providing medical assistance and education to other countries through its “Cuban medical diplomacy” programs as many experts called them.<sup>[3,4]</sup> The main premise is the fact that the Revolution did not wait for the development of its health services to provide help to other countries. The history of Cuban international cooperation in all continents speaks by itself, aims at developing and strengthening national capacities through the training of human resources, achieving a sustainable cooperation (as a primary goal), improving the life quality of people and giving continuity to the actions of Cuban health professionals, when they are withdrawn from the countries where they perform their work.

Within the framework of what has been called the governance of global health, where policies and funds destinations are decided, and where the greater weight of decisions lies in a small group, integrated by governments of donor countries, philanthropic organizations, public–private associations, among

others, the Cuban health diplomacy emerges as a model for true integration, taking into account the principals of international law, concerning friendly relations and co-operation among states in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.<sup>[5]</sup> In essence, it must be highlighted, that Cuba pays special attention to the creation and strengthening of infrastructures that guarantee sustainability respecting the responsibilities and priorities of states. Also, it is relevant to mention that the development of constructive relations between the parties provide a respectful exchange of resources, technologies and knowledge, where countries cooperate as partners, beyond the levels of development, voluntarily and without economic, political, or procedural constraints. Due the aforementioned, Cuba is positioned as a key participant of the global multilateral health system arena, especially with regard to its actions as a cooperation agent for sustainable development in health.

Cuba’s government has always provided support and solidarity to others in areas such as education, sports, culture, science, and particularly health. Without ignoring some of the shortfalls of our model of international cooperation, there are many lessons that Cuba can share to provide sustainable medical aid based on people’s needs, with an increased state responsibility, suggesting the adaptation of specific policies and programs are feasible in countries with different political and economic systems. To conclude, the Cuban health diplomacy model, focused on international cooperation, provides a pathway to strengthening cooperation and strategic engagement in ensuring health as a human right and a global public good. Therefore, political coherence based on solid principles and motivated solely by human solidarity while benefiting the largest possible number of people with quality health care and taking in particular the needs, priorities, and conditions of recipient countries become more and more paramount and needed.

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There are no conflicts of interest.

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