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Editorial

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Health and work: a new perspective

Work can be conceived from different perspectives that vary among individuals and communities. In the beginning of humanity, work was associated with activities that sought to satisfy basic needs; then, thanks to the industrial revolution, it became specialized following the innovation and automation of many processes.

Technological advances have made work relations transcend from the level of doing to the level of knowing how to do and knowing how to think. It should be noted that the latter concept has been put forward to identify where the essence of new work needs and interpersonal relations lie and, in this way, provide the basis for changing the priorities of work relations. At this point, conditions that affect people's health and that may compromise the health of communities arise, a scenario where the concepts of health and work converge.

Having said that, the transformation of work can be understood as a dynamic element of society and, in extreme cases, as a factor that eventually explains the deterioration of workers' health. Given this scenario, the Editorial Committee of the Journal of the Faculty of Medicine of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, in this issue, decided to provide a space to present various studies and reflections on occupational health and safety.

Although, in general terms, workers have improved their living conditions thanks to technological advances that have reduced the physical effort required to perform many work activities and to the promotion of different actions in various socio-cultural areas, it is true that there are external factors that somehow compromise their physical and emotional health. (1) In this regard, factors such as emotional intelligence are fundamental for individuals to be able to respond to the demands of their work. Likewise, in this context, workers must face new epidemics, no longer caused by inadequate health conditions, but by stress (also known as burnout syndrome), competitiveness, among others.

Currently, the question is whether it is necessary to establish long working hours in order to increase a nation's productivity or whether less working hours should be implemented to ensure a better quality of life and allow more people to access the labor market, especially considering that one of the major causes of unemployment is over-qualification, which is increasing among young people. In this issue, the reader will find articles that invite to reflect on health conditions at work in different age groups; for example, Torres-Tovar *et al.* (2) analyze the regulatory framework on child labor in Colombia and describe the particularities of this phenomenon in the coffee, panela, rice, sugar cane and cotton industries, including the integration of education and work through the Escuela Nueva (New School) program promoted by the Committee of Coffee Growers of Caldas.

Other studies report the prevalence of diseases associated with different occupational exposures: Romero *et al.* (3) point out that exposure to pollutants such as coal dust may be associated with the development of pneumoconiosis; Molina-Guzmán *et al.* (4)

show that occupational exposure to livestock can lead to zoonotic diseases; and Villamizar & Navarro-Vargas (5) describe how contact with asbestos can produce lung diseases and even cancer, and how Colombia, with the adoption of Act 1968 of 2019 (6), banned this mineral, which represents a great advance for the health of workers and Colombians in general. This issue also highlights the role of occupational therapists and health professionals, who in recent years have played an important role in the study of occupational health conditions in Colombia. (7,8)

In addition, two studies dealing with retirement are also presented. On the one hand, Aguilera-Velasco *et al.* (9) point out the need for educational preparation for retirement, understood not only as receiving a pension, but as the result of the joy of having built a better society through work. On the other hand, Gray-Gariazzo *et al.* (10) consider work as a possible risk factor in the old age and, therefore, call for transformations in the regulation, inspection and management of occupational health and safety.

Thus, the Journal of the Faculty of Medicine, issue 4, volume 64, highlights the importance of research in occupational health, providing documentary references that allow those interested in the topic to delve into the health-work relationship.

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