

Health

Addictions, an increasingly prevalent problem

Cooperativism

A more sustainable and equitable future

Lifestyle

The brain benefits of reading

Women in the healthcare profession



Summary

Health

- 4 **Addiction, a mental illness.**
Data warns about an increase of consumption habits.
- 6 **Legal, but highly dangerous.**
Alcohol and tobacco are the two most commonly consumed substances.
- 8 **Spain leads the world in benzodiazepine use.**
This group of hypnotosedatives is used to treat anxiety or insomnia.
- 10 **Without substance there is also addiction.**
Dependence on gambling, sex, work and social networks.

Cooperatives and social medicine

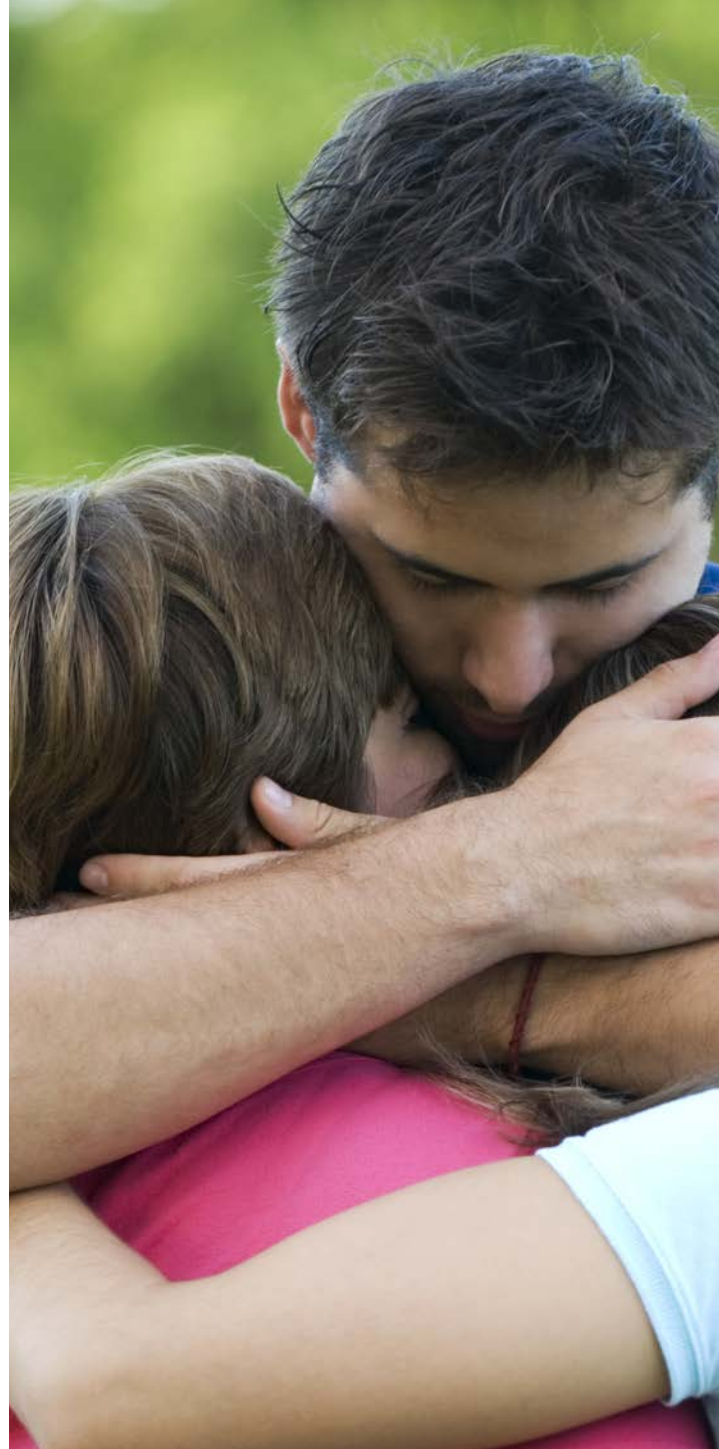
- 14 **ASISA.** We review the news of the group, as the new accreditation of the MIR Teaching Unit of HLA Moncloa University in Madrid.
- 16 **Assistència Sanitària.** The elderly people, FC Barcelona fans and students are among the main protagonists of the organisation's initiatives.
- 18 **Fundación Espriu.**
Among the foundation's recent events, it is worthy to highlight its participation in the debate about Chile's new health system.

In depth

- 20 **The role of women in the practice of medicine.**
Past, present and future of the feminisation of hospitals.
- 26 **Interview with Concepción Giner,**
Medical Director of the Hospital HLA Vistahermosa.

Lifestyle

- 28 **Destinations.**
A tour of the islands of Malta, Gozo and Comino.
- 30 **Sport.**
Great tennis milestones in history.
- 32 **Mind.**
What are the health benefits of reading?
- 34 **Flight mode.**
Ginger shots for increased immune protection.



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Editorial

Working together

The feminisation of the healthcare professions is an obvious fact. Anyone who visits a medical centre or a hospital will notice that the majority of the people who work there are women. If we take the Spanish Economically Active Population Survey as a reference, 73% of healthcare workers are women, while in the other sectors this figure drops to 47%.

The rapid increase in the presence of women in healthcare over the last few decades has had a number of implications in the way the profession is practised, which we analyse in the *In Depth* section. We also examine the role of women in management positions thanks to the testimony of Dr. Concepción Giner, Medical Director of the HLA Vistahermosa Hospital.

In addition, coinciding with the celebration of World Mental Health Day in October, we dedicate the *Health* section to explore the problem of addictions. Whether associated with substance use or with specific behaviours or activities, addictive behaviours are an increasingly widespread mental disorder.

While fentanyl, a powerful analgesic, has caused a devastating epidemic of addiction in the United States and it is becoming a potential threat to European youth, in Spain the use of benzodiazepines, an anxiolytic drug of the hypnotosedative family, has spread to the point of becoming the country with the highest consumption in the world. This is alarming, bearing in mind that the risk of addiction associated with their use without medical supervision is very high.

Finally, in the *Lifestyle* section, we propose a trip to Malta, an island with a historical and cultural legacy that never ceases to amaze. And for those who, with the arrival of autumn, are hesitating whether to find a book to entertain themselves, we write an article about the benefits of a healthy habit such as reading. Recent studies claim that six months of reading, at any age, can change the deepest structures of our brain.

*It is needed
to raise social
awareness
about the
impact of
addictions
today.*

Carlos Zarco
General Manager of the
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Fundació • Fundación

Established in 1989, the Fundación Espriu integrates the entities using the cooperative healthcare model created by Dr. Josep Espriu: Autogestió Sanitària, SCIAS, Lavinia and ASISA, which make up Assistència and ASISA Groups.



Addiction, a mental illness

Addictions are a chronic health problem that generates changes in people's lives. Excessive consumption of certain substances causes significant psychological, social and physical consequences, but also dependence on certain activities or harmful habits..

By **Àngela Zorrilla**

Addiction, as defined by the World Health Organisation, is a mental health disorder and a behavioural disorder characterised by the compulsive need to consume a substance or perform an activity despite all the negative consequences it implies. Substance-related addictions include, mainly, those associated with alcohol, drugs, certain medicines and even tobacco; but also behavioural addictions, which are increasingly present in society, such as dependence on gambling, work or sex. Moreover, in this last group, and in the midst of the technological and digital era, it is important to add a new dependence linked to social networks.

Addiction is considered a disease and its negative consequences are numerous. This extreme dependence can affect the ability to carry out essential day-to-day activities, such as going to work, and can

increase the probability of suffering from sleep disorders, mental health problems, and other health problems or cardiovascular diseases, among others. Although in many cases it can be complex, addictions are (and should be) treatable from a medical and psychological point of view.

THE PROFILE OF ADDICTION

In Spain, 75% of the people treated in 2022 for substance addiction were men. According to the report *Profile of addictions in 2022*, produced by UNAD's Network of Attention to Addictions, cocaine, heroin and alcohol were the most commonly used substances. Women mainly use alcohol and cocaine, while men are more likely to use cocaine and heroin. In addition, the number of women treated for addiction to medicines such as sleeping pills has increased this year by 22% compared to 2022.

In terms of behavioural addictions, the main addiction for women is bingo (31 %) and slot machines, and the most popular online addiction is video games (44 %), while for men, sports betting is the most popular in both areas. Finally, the report places the profile of the average addicted patient between 34 and 41 years of age, with primary education completed. ■

■ **According to UNAD, women mainly use alcohol and cocaine, while men prefer cocaine and heroin.**



A social impact

Currently, according to the latest *Survey on Alcohol and Drugs in Spain EDADES 2022*, alcohol and tobacco are the substances that start to be consumed at an early age, around 16 years old. When it comes to illegal drugs, however, cannabis tops the list and is first used at the age of 18.

The *World Drug Report 2023* prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) notes that more than 296 million people used drugs in 2021 and that the number of people suffering from drug use disorders has also soared to 39.5 million people. In other words, there has been a 45 % increase in ten years.

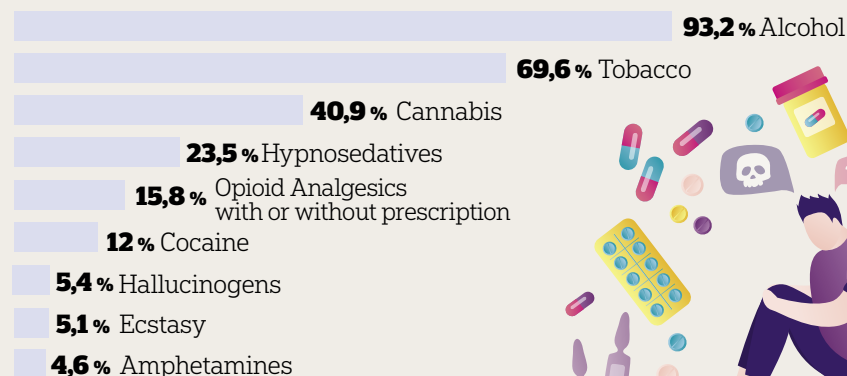
The United Nations also warns that the youth population is the most vulnerable to drug use, as well as the most affected by drug use disorders. And in their global report they add an example: in Africa, 70 %

of people in treatment are under 35 years old and the main difficulty of medical approach is with the treatment of these addictive disorders. In 2021, only 1 in 5 people suffering from drug-related problems were in treatment.

Another significant obstacle observed by the UNODC is the rise of synthetic drugs, which may be due to their ease and speed of production, as well as their low cost due to the lack of regulation and criminal groups that are transforming the illegal market. In addition, the rise of one of the most popular drugs in recent months, fentanyl, has radically altered the opioid market in the United States. In 2021, most of the 90,000 overdose deaths in the country were already related to illegally produced fentanyl. In 2022, the drug accounted for around three-quarters of overdose deaths.

Prevalence of psychoactive substances used

in lifetime in the Spanish population aged 15-64 years




SOURCE: OEDA Survey on Alcohol and Drugs in Spain (EDADES) - 2022





Legal, but highly dangerous

Among the legalised drugs most widely consumed by the Spanish population, alcohol and tobacco stand out. 2 substances which are increasingly being consumed at a younger age and which, in the long term, can lead to serious health problems.



☐ Deaths from smoking-related causes are higher than deaths from any other drug.

Alcohol, with 76.4 %, and tobacco, with 39 %, are the two substances most consumed in the last twelve months, according to data from the latest *Survey on Alcohol and Other Drugs in Spain EDADES 2022*, published by the Spanish Ministry of Health. Their prevalence is also very high. More than 93% of the population aged between 15 and 64 say they have consumed alcoholic beverages at some point in their lives, followed by tobacco, which 70% of them say they have tried at some time in their lives. The problem, according to the Ministry, is that both substances are consumed at an earlier age; alcohol is first tried at around 16 and a half years and the first cigarette is taken, on average, at 16.6 years of age. These social habits can lead to physical or psychological dependence, which is why they are two of the most prevalent addictions in society.

Alcoholism and smoking are widespread practices in Mediterranean culture, but their lack of control leads to significant negative consequences for individuals. Excessive consumption of these two substances has been attributed, among other factors, to the appearance of certain diseases such as cirrhosis or some types of cancer. Excessive alcohol consumption, in particular, causes important health problems such as gastritis and ulcers, renal, cardiac and, above all, hepatic disorders. In Spain, in fact, 40-50 % of cirrhosis

cases are caused by alcohol consumption, which also contributes to worsening liver function in patients with other liver diseases.

Besides, the organism pains the harmful consequences of smoking as it affects many tissues, organs and systems, leading to major pathologies. In fact, deaths caused by tobacco addiction are higher than deaths caused by diseases such as AIDS or tuberculosis, by the consumption of any other drug, by traffic accidents, suicides or murders.

NEW FORMS OF LEISURE

Until recently, tobacco and alcohol consumption was largely male-dominated and diseases such as cirrhosis or lung cancer were seen as common pathologies among men. In recent decades, this situation is changing. The incorporation of women into new social roles has facilitated their access to this type of drugs and, in addition, in general, there has been a shift from moderate consumption linked to certain social moments to more compulsive consumption habits. Tobacco and alcohol are now a key part of weekend leisure, where consumers are increasingly younger and where large quantities are consumed in a short period of time just to experience new or pleasurable sensations. ■

A trace of consumption

As legal substances in Spain, there is a formula for tracking the consumption of alcohol and tobacco. Both include a special tax in their price that allows their (legal) sales in the country to be controlled. Therefore, in the recent statistics (2022) published by the Spanish Tax Agency, it can be seen that consumption of alcohol and tobacco is increasing. On the one hand, 2182 million packets of tobacco were sold in 2022, 4.1% more than in the previous year. On the other hand, the consumption of alcohol and other alcoholic beverages reached 101 million litres sold in 2022, an alarming figure that represents an increase of almost 19% compared to 2021.

Spain leads the world in the consumption of benzodiazepines

Benzodiazepines are a medicine of the hypnotosedative group, often prescribed as a muscle relaxant and a solution to sleep problems due to their anxiolytic effect. Excessive use can lead to health problems and dependence.

Side effects of benzodiazepines include drowsiness, weakness or dizziness, as they depress the central nervous system (CNS).

Many people in Spain suffer from insomnia or anxiety and they are treated with benzodiazepines, a drug with anxiolytic and relaxing properties that belongs to the hypnotosedative family. Its chemical formulation makes it a nervous system depressant that acts selectively, providing the patient with a feeling of peace and tranquillity similar to the effects of some drugs. Currently, most of these drugs are prescribed by doctors and health professionals. For this reason, it is difficult to control them.

Their danger is evident: they can cause addiction. In fact, at the beginning of 2023, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) already warned that Spain is the country with the highest consumption of benzodiazepines in the world. And these figures have been worrying for years; in 2020, for example, almost 110 doses per 1000 inhabitants were consumed daily in Spain. Belgium, with 84 doses, follows in second place, and countries such

as Germany are far removed from this health problem with a rate of 0.04 doses per day. According to the latest data from the *EDADES 2022* survey, the consumption of hypnotosedatives with or without prescription has increased in the last year, corroborating a growing trend since 2018 to reach 23.5 %. Last year, 13.1 % of people aged 15-64 used them at some point in the past 12 months, a propor-

tion that rises to 16 % among the female population.

Competitiveness, mental health problems due to the pandemic, stress and the current lifestyle are some of the factors

that could explain this high consumption. Society uses this type of medicine and chemistry to disconnect from its routine. Benzodiazepines, including diazepam, lorazepam, clonazepam or alprazolam, calm or sedate people and they are the quickest way to treat anxiety or insomnia, although they are usually not the best or the only solution. On other occasions, they are prescribed to counteract the effects of some drugs such as cocaine, but if this consumption lasts longer than recommended, it can lead to possible dependence. Benzodiazepines affect the brain by modifying the

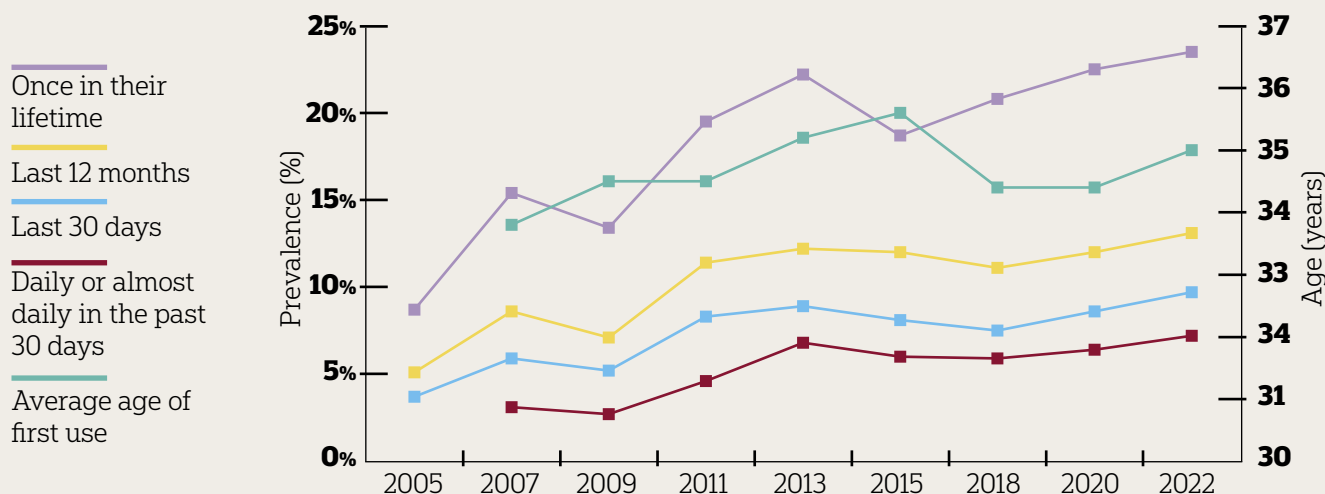
■ Last year, 13.1% of the Spanish population aged between 15 and 64 consumed this hypnotic, a figure that rises to 16% in the case of the female population.

person's neuronal response: first they will cause a rebound effect when their action is over; then tolerance will increase and they will generate abstinence. At that time, an episode of dependence may begin, in other words, the need and impossibility to control the desire to take the drug. ■

A health risk

The development of benzodiazepines began in 1950, and it was in 1960 that the first benzodiazepine, metaminodiazepoxide, was patented. Shortly afterwards, in 1963, diazepam was patented, a drug with more anxiolytic potency and a greater muscle relaxant effect. Today, benzodiazepines - like most drugs - have side effects. They do not appear in all cases and not all patients notice them with the same intensity, but this type of hypnotics can cause drowsiness, especially in the first days of treatment, loss of orientation, weakness, nausea, headache, tachycardia, memory difficulties and even slowness of speech. Moreover, the problem becomes more serious when patients build up tolerance to the drug and increase their dosage until they become addicted, which is often very difficult for the patient to detect.

Prevalence of hypnotic use with or without prescription (%) and average age starting to use in population aged 15-64 years. Spain, 2005-2022 (EDADES 2022)



Without substance there is also addiction

Behavioural addictions have in common that there is no intake of any intoxicating substance; however, their symptoms are just as severe as any dependence. People addicted to certain behaviours or activities experience a deterioration in their health as they frequently abuse of a bad habit.

In the 21st century, addictions no longer focus only on behaviours derived from the consumption of toxic substances such as cannabis or tobacco. There are also behaviours that can lead to addiction in which other aspects come into play and where there is no intake at all. Behavioural addiction is related to specific behaviours or activities, as in the case of gambling disorder and, in recent years, online video game addiction disorders. This type of dependence also includes addiction to social networks, sex and work, among others.

The main characteristics of these behaviours, beyond the non-use of substances, are: loss of control, psychological dependence and the interference in leading a normal life. This can also lead to a loss of interest in other hobbies or activities that were previously pleasurable. ■



Gambling

One of the greatest dangers is that gambling is becoming a normalised leisure activity among adolescents and young people. According to government surveys, in 2019 and 2020, 63.6 % of Spanish people aged between 15 and 64 had gambled money offline at some point in the last few months. This is a notable increase in this behaviour, which in 2017 stood at 59.5 %. Linked to this practice, the online gaming sector is also growing. When gambling becomes the centre of a person's life, they are constantly thinking about how, when or where to get the money to be able to gamble, and they are unable to stop despite the negative consequences of these habits, such as damaging their family, work and personal relationships. ■

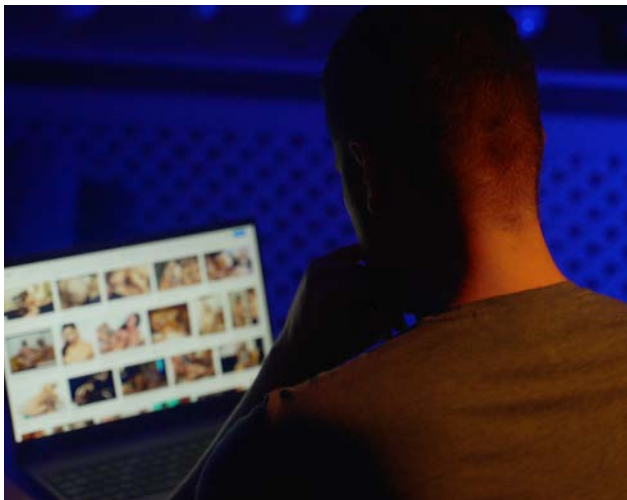


Social networks

Internet and social media addiction happens when someone is unable to keep up with the normal daily rhythm due to excessive and, above all, uncontrolled use of the internet. This addiction includes shopping, surfing, online games or social networking, among other distractions. According to a study carried out in Spain, only 1.5 % of young people aged between 12 and 17 have an internet addiction, a figure that is much lower than in countries such as China, Taiwan or Korea, where the percentage of people with this problem is as high as 30 %. The estimate, however, is that 21.3 % of Spanish adolescents are at risk of developing an addiction of this type due to the time they already spend surfing the net. In fact, a significant proportion of this sector spends more than two hours a day connected to a social network. ■

Sex

In 2018, the World Health Organization added compulsive sexual behavior to its international classification of diseases. Commonly called *sexual addiction*, this disorder is characterized by the frequency and intensity of sexual relationships, but also of fantasies and cravings to conceive the act. This behavior can manifest itself in several ways, such as through promiscuous relationships, sexual encounters with strangers, use of pornography or erotic telephone lines. In these cases, the main treatment is usually based on cognitive behavioral therapy with which to learn restructuring techniques, avoid risky situations or identify circumstances of danger. ■



Work

Many employees spend too many hours and too much energy on working and they do it compulsively. This has negative consequences for their jobs and their personal life. Workaholism is sometimes masked under a high level of responsibility, sacrifice or dedication, but it is still an important mental problem that needs to be correctly diagnosed. This disorder can affect health in different ways, such as increasing cholesterol levels, favouring the development of heart or sleep disorders, and leading to hair loss or extreme fatigue. ■

3 tools to help addicts

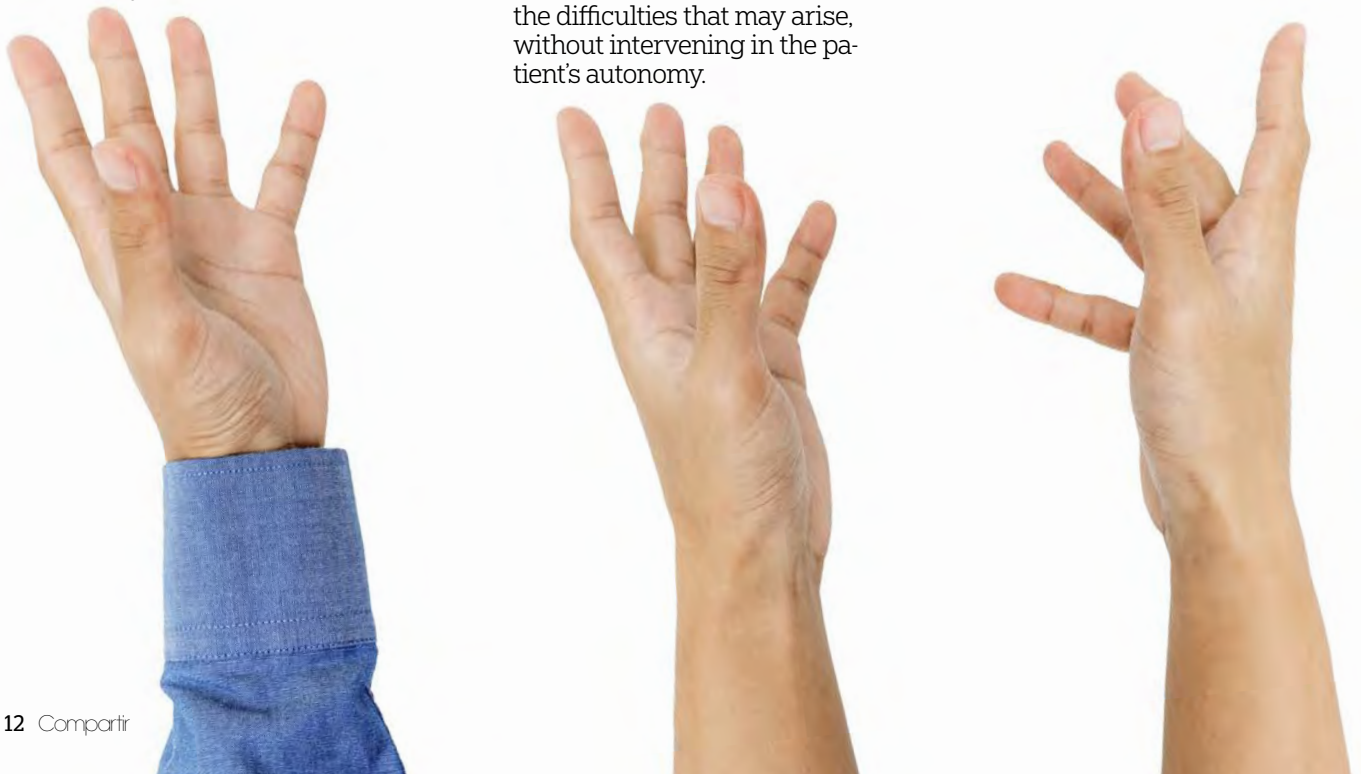
The role of society and people around the addicted patients is crucial in the recovery process. These are the organisations playing a key role in this area.

Addictions and the abusive use of drugs or toxic substances are a problem which requires tools to seek help, as well as to prevent and treat behavioural dependencies. To achieve this, there are several actions, including hospital services, which are available to all citizens, the active role of the family and the environment and, finally, education in schools. In fact, according to *EDADES*, 90 % of the population believes that providing education in schools about this health crisis would largely resolve the situation.■

1 Hospitals are essential to start any treatment for any disease. Public institutions covering this service are designed and framed within the National Drugs Plan, which has resources for attending and monitoring people addicted to drugs. The first step is visiting the general practitioner, who will refer the patient to the addictive behaviour unit of the corresponding province. There, they will evaluate the case and propose a treatment that, depending on the diagnosis, will be referred to an outpatient treatment centre, a detoxification clinic or a therapeutic community.

2 Family plays a crucial role in the recovery of those suffering from addiction. The emotional and psychological strain of the process is very important, and the area most affected is the communication area. Also, misinformation and lack of knowledge about how to manage a situation prevents the affected person from receiving effective help. A good approach is to be aware about the rules and guidelines proposed by the medical centre, as well as an active communication with the medical centre to inform about the difficulties that may arise, without intervening in the patient's autonomy.

3 Education, finally, is the most powerful tool to prevent this social problem, as it is the place where young people spend most of their time, and school environment provides a reflection and a model of young people's behaviour. The use of psychoactive substances can manifest itself through student behaviour, such as underachievement or unexcused absences, along with antisocial or violent behaviour. In addition, collaboration between schools and health care organisations can promote active awareness.





Assistència Sanitària

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ASISA creates a new General Management of the Business Area headed by Luis Beraza

The insurance company strengthens its commercial structure to continue to drive its transformation, grow and improve its profitability.

ASISA has reinforced its commercial structure with the creation of a new General Management of the Business Area, which will be headed by Luis Beraza de Diego. With this incorporation, the insurance company keeps promoting its strategic plans of commercial transformation with the aim of diversifying its activity, accelerating its growth, improving its profitability and establishing new forms of relationship and links with its customers.

Luis Beraza has joined ASISA after a successful career in the financial sector, where he has gained



Luis Beraza
de Diego, new
general manager
of ASISA's
Business Area.

extensive experience in the areas of retail and corporate banking, digital banking, data analysis and marketing, among others. At the head of Abanca's General Business Management, his previous position before joining ASISA, Beraza

was responsible for the domestic business since the institution's creation in 2014.

Luis Beraza has a degree in Business Management and Administration, specialising in Finance, from the CEU San Pablo University in Madrid and an MBA from the IESE Business School in Barcelona.

In this new General Management of ASISA's Business Area, Luis Beraza will lead the commercial transformation plans of the company, which in recent years has diversified its activity to become a multi-branch insurer focusing on the care of individuals and families with its portfolio of health and dental, life, accident, death, pet and travel assistance products. ■

HLA Moncloa University, accredited as a MIR Teaching Unit

The HLA Moncloa University Hospital (Madrid) has achieved its first accreditation as a MIR Teaching Unit in the speciality of Intensive Care Medicine, starting the next academic year.

For this certification, "the request of the center itself to become a Teaching Unit, the favorable report of the corresponding Teaching Commission and the competent body in matters of specialized health training of the Autonomous Community of Madrid and compliance with the program prepared by the National Specialty Commission, approved by the State Secretariat of Universities and Research of the Ministry of Education and Sciences," details Dr. Vicente Gómez-Tello, professor of Inten-

sive Care Medicine at the European University of Madrid (UEM), head of the Emergency Service at the HLA Universitario Moncloa and responsible for Postgraduate Training at the center.

Dr. Juan José Oñoro, head of Intensive Medicine at HLA Universitario Moncloa, remarks that "it is a great challenge to be the first department to undertake this new stage in our hospital. This great responsibility, which we assume as a team, is exciting and motivating".

According to Dr. José Ramón Vicente Rull, the centre's managing director, adds that the MIR accreditation process "has been laborious as well as satisfying. In this way we reinforce our connection with the university and our commitment



The hospital will be teaching the speciality at its centre from the next academic year.

to quality training". Since 2013, the HLA has celebrated eight promotions of students trained at its centre in the Medicine Degree by the UEM. ■

Brief news

● **The Social Council of Miguel Hernández University of Elche (UMH)** has awarded the 2023 prize, in the category of Non-Profit Organisation, to the ASISA Foundation, in recognition of its contribution to training, research, development and knowledge transfer in various fields such as clinical simulation, social inclusion and assisted human reproduction. Dr María Tormo, Director of Planning and Development at ASISA, received the award and emphasised the commitment which the ASISA Group has been making to the people of Alicante for many years. Tormo ended her speech reminding the audience that although the ASISA Foundation is still young, "the distinction we have been awarded shows that we are on the right track".

.....

● **The HLA Group and the Fundación Lucentum Baloncesto Alicante** have renewed the sponsorship agreement for the 2023-24 season, the eighth consecutive campaign in which the HLA Group and the Lucentum entity will go hand in hand in the club's project. In addition, this upcoming season will be the team's fifth in the second highest category of national basketball. "HLA Alicante has established itself as a major reference in Alicante sport," says Dr. Francisco Ivorra, adding that "HLA is proud to collaborate with Lucentum to promote this project and the values of teamwork, effort and commitment for a healthy lifestyle".

ASISA Vida insurance policies continue to be the most competitive on the market

A study by Inese and Global Actuarial concludes that ASISA Vida Tranquilidad insurance premiums are the best in relation with the coverage they offer.

ASISA Vida insurance policies continue to be the most competitive on the Spanish life insurance market, according to the *Comparative study of life insurance premiums 2023*. The study compared the products of 19 insurance companies and 7 bancassurance companies in different scenarios and using *mystery shopping* techniques.

After analysing the results, the study concludes that ASISA Vida offers the best average insurance premium for the different ages and capital amounts studied, with coverage for death and absolute and permanent disability. ASISA Vida's savings compared to the average price of its competitors exceed 145 euros per year. The study shows that ASISA Vida Tranquilidad premiums are particularly advantageous for customers aged 50 and over.

The Managing Director of ASISA Vida, Francisco Martínez Aguilar, points out that "ASISA Vida has established itself as the company with the most competitive life insurance products thanks to a portfolio of products adapted to the real needs of our policyholders providing a high value to the client".

Furthermore, during the first half of 2023, ASISA Vida continued to increase its insurance premiums by more than 15% compared to the same period the previous year, according to ICEA data, and now has more than 98,000 policyholders. ■



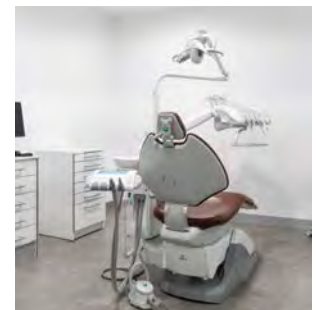
Promotional image of Asisa Vida products.

ASISA Dental opens a new clinic in Benalmádena

ASISA Dental expands its presence in the province of Malaga by opening its third clinic, located on Camino del Prado in Benalmádena. This new centre, added to those the group already are operating in the city of Malaga and in Marbella, consolidates ASISA Dental's presence on Costa del Sol and it provides a better health cover for the towns of Benalmádena and its

neighbouring towns of Mijas, Fuengirola and Torremolinos.

The new ASISA Dental clinic in Benalmádena is equipped with advanced technology and a team of highly qualified professionals who will take care of the oral health of every patient, whether or not they are ASISA insured, providing comprehensive diagnosis and high quality care with the



most innovative treatments. The centre will cover a range of specialities such as implantology, oral surgery, periodontics, endodontics, paediatric dentistry and orthodontics, among others. ■

Brief news

Assistència Sanitària and Barça's YouPlay, a unique experience

28 basketball fans visited the Palau Blaugrana.

Luck smiled on those who, this summer, were able to demonstrate their level of basketball knowledge in the privileged scenario of the Palau Blaugrana pavilion. On this occasion the spotlight fell not on sports professionals but on twenty-eight amateurs who, thanks to trusting their health to Assistència Sanitària, were entered into a massive raffle.

As a *partner* of FC Barcelona, the entity organised a day of fun and sport in one of the most iconic spaces in the history of basketball. The participants entered the pitch and stepped onto the court of the pavilion where they had the unique experience of playing on the same pitch where the Blaugrana team plays its matches.

After the warm-up and two semi-finals that led to the final match, from which the winners



emerged, the participants received their prizes and enjoyed a snack. In addition, all participants received the complete equipment as a gift.

With actions of this kind, which all the participants agreed were "unforgettable", Assistència Sanitària aims to strengthen its ties with its policyholders, in this case by highlighting its alliance with FC Barcelona, sharing values such as excellence, leadership and teamwork. ■

Players enjoyed the experience through a raffle held by Assistència Sanitària.

The group continues to focus on the over-75s

Assissenior is an exclusive medical centre which aims to improve the quality of care and to facilitate the access to specialist monitoring, while maintaining a global vision of the patient and providing comprehensive, personalised and exclusive care for people over the age of 75. The centre is located in a large 1,400 square metre space in the heart of Barcelona, within the Grup Assistència medical centre.

As a reference in the specialised care of geriatric



pathology, Assissenior improves patients' quality of life by coordinating the monitoring of all their pathologies.

At the same time, it also aims to meet their needs

for occasional treatment for minor acute illnesses with the shortest possible waiting time and prior appointment.

Each patient has a centralised computerised medical history and an assigned doctor who is responsible for long-term follow-up to ensure continuity of care. It also facilitates access and coordination with other exclusive services and specialities of the medical directory, according to the needs of each case. ■

● **Assistència Sanitària's new advertising campaign** has now been launched, with the company highlighting the fact that it is the medical insurer promoted by medical professionals, and that it is also recognised by this group as the best among all the organisations.

● **As usual, FC Barcelona's new signings** and the players who joined the club after the holiday break have been examined by the Assistència Sanitària team and Hospital de Barcelona to check their physical condition and to rule out any risk factors that might affect their performance.

● **Hospital de Barcelona**, a benchmark in private healthcare, has taken a further step towards consolidating its digital presence with the creation of its official page on LinkedIn, the leading professional network. This new platform is presented as a strategic space for sharing the organisation's most relevant news and developments with its community of followers and interested audiences. It also features exclusive content related to day-to-day achievements and progress, innovations in facilities and services, as well as job opportunities.

Assistència Sanitària provides its scholarships for health professionals

In 15 editions, the organisation has granted 467 scholarships and 436,000 euros.

Assistència Sanitària and its bursary programme for health professionals have renewed, for the fifteenth consecutive year, their commitment to training in the field of health. For the 2022-23 academic year, more than two hundred applications were received which, after the selection process, have been turned into grants worth 30,880 euros for thirty-three students on master's or postgraduate courses in the area of health.

As Dr. Ignacio Orce, President of Assistència Sanitària, pointed out during the award ceremony, "in order to improve the health system, the current situation requires more than ever that we highlight the work of health workers and encourage them to update their knowledge, giving special recognition to the profession. From all points of view, the balance of these fifteen editions



In the picture, the students who have received this year's scholarships.

is positive: 4,000 requests have been received, of which 467 scholarships have been given and around 436,000 euros have been adjudicated". In this latest promotion, 11 master's and postgraduate nursing degrees were awarded in different specialisations, such as surgery, hospital emergencies and neonatal-paediatrics.

With this initiative, Assistència Sanitària aims to ensure the optimum preparation of doctors, nurses and other people who look after the health of the public, whose professional practice makes quality healthcare possible. ■



Activity Report for 2022

During a crucial year in terms of rating doctors and protecting insured persons, the 2022 corporate reports provide an overview of the Assistència Group, including activity data, targets achieved and innovative initiatives, among other relevant information. They are, in short, the best and most accurate reflection of its unique reality.

Assistència Sanitària and SCIAS have jointly published this compendium of the institution's activities in a carefully edited edition with in-depth articles on a variety of aspects and different types of content, which is available in the publications section of their respective websites.

ASSET recognises and adds SCIAS to its team

The economic and financial director of SCIAS Hospital de Barcelona, Marta Sans, has joined the governing board of ASSET, the Spanish Association of Corporate Financiers, an organisation that develops activities in the field of training, analysis and study and networking to enable managers to exchange their experiences and constantly update their professional skills.

As a cooperative and social economy organisation, SCIAS Hospital de Barcelona has certain qualities that

make it unique, and it is partly for this reason that its teams stand out for their level of knowledge in their different areas of expertise.

In this specific case, Marta Sans has an extensive career in financial positions and, in addition to her responsibilities at SCIAS Hospital de Barcelona, she is also the economic manager of Gravida. She chairs the economic-fiscal committee of ACES, she participates in the fiscal committee of PIMEC and she is a member of the *working capital* committee of ASSET. ■



Marta Sans, economic and financial director of Hospital de Barcelona.

Hospital de Barcelona, a maternal and child health reference point

Dedicated to pregnancy healthcare and targeted to professionals, but also open to pregnant women, on 17 November the leading centre for Assistència Sanitària policyholders is hosting an event of the highest level in the field of maternal and child health. With renowned speakers with experience in their fields of specialisation, the two main round tables - on physical exercise and pregnancy and on postpartum recovery - will be followed by a practical workshop on nutrition and the advice to bear in mind during pregnancy. ■



Cooperatives and sustainable development

The international conference emphasised the role of cooperatives in building a more sustainable and equitable future.

The international conference “Cooperatives and sustainable development” was held in the majestic plenary hall of San Sebastian City Hall on July 1. The event, which coincided with the commemoration of the International Day of Cooperatives, brought together cooperative leaders and experts from different parts of the world to analyse the crucial role played by cooperative enterprises in promoting sustainable development.

Organised jointly by the Consejo Superior de Cooperativas de Euskadi, Konfekoop, the Confederación Española de Cooperativas de Trabajo Asociado and

the International Cooperative Alliance, the event brought together a diverse and committed audience sharing a common goal: to explore how the cooperative model can make a significant contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations for the year 2030.

During the conference, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals were examined in detail, each illustrated with concrete examples of cooperative enterprises that have demonstrated that they are sustainable and have a positive impact on people's lifestyles and communities. From poverty eradication to climate

The event was attended by cooperative leaders and experts from around the world to address the 17 SDGs in detail.

action, gender equality and the promotion of quality education, cooperatives presented a vision in which collaboration and equity are the keys to a more sustainable and fair world.

Fundación Espriu, renowned for its contribution to health cooperativism, was one of the emblematic cases presented at the conference. Its experience is a living testimony to how cooperatives can facilitate access to quality health services while at the same time improve the working conditions of professionals. These achievements are a clear indication of the fundamental role that cooperatives play in promoting healthy lives and people's well-being, as stipulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The International Day of Cooperatives, celebrated every first Saturday of July, is an emblematic date that aims to highlight the fundamental role of cooperatives in economic and social development at the global level. ■

The future of health is cooperative

The Chilean seminar pointed to cooperativism as a powerful tool for health system reform.

In the current process of reforming Chile's health system, one of the most pressing challenges is to find financing models which promote solidarity and improve access to medical care for all citizens.

With the aim of spreading and promoting this valuable alternative, the health cooperative Sermecoop organised a seminar on 18 July in Santiago de Chile entitled "The future of health is cooperative". The event brought together experts, sector leaders and government representatives with a common interest in promoting health models based on solidarity.

One of the highlighted moments of the seminar was the participation of the Fundación Espriu, sharing the successful experience of Asistencia Sanitaria and Asisa, two cooperative-based organisations with a long history of success in the Spanish health system. The event

also featured the participation of other internationally renowned health cooperatives, such as Unimed, from Brazil, and Sanatorio Americano, from Uruguay, sharing their experiences and successes in the promotion of health through cooperativism.

The seminar was attended by illustrious figures from the health sector, including former Chilean health ministers Pedro García and Enrique Paris. In addition, representatives from the Ministry of Economy and other leaders in the sector provided their perspectives on the role that cooperatives can play in building a more inclusive and sustainable health system in Chile.

In the context of the health reform, the Chilean cooperative movement is working to achieve a regulation which places cooperatives on an equal level with other types of business in the health sector, allowing



a more equitable environment for the development of these solidarity initiatives.

The Chilean cooperative Sermecoop stands out in this endeavour, which since 1967 has been establishing agreements with workers in local companies, enabling them to join the cooperative and gain access to health services not covered by other sources of public or private funding.

Today, the cooperative has agreements with 312 companies and brings together more than 96,000 members, making it an example of the growth and relevance of health cooperatives in Chile. ■

From left to right: Carlos Zarco, General Director of the Fundación Espriu; Jose Pérez, Deputy Director of the Fundación Espriu; Jessica Gutiérrez, Manager of Sermecoop; Mauricio Carcamo, President of Sermecoop; Ariel Bango, President of Sanatorio Americano, Uruguay, and Marcos Cunha, Health Director of Unimed, Brazil.



Education Tour in Panamá

Fundación Espriu took part in the National Education Tour, a yearly series of conferences organised by Cooperativa Profesionales, from Panama, in different parts of the country with the aim of showing its members innovative experiences and strengthening the organisation's cooperative identity.


On 17 and 18 August, Dr. Carlos Zarco, Director General of the Fundación Espriu, had the opportunity to explain in detail the activities carried out by the organisations that support the foundation, as well as its structure. This presentation was a journey through the historical evolution of coopera-

tives and the transformational impact that the cooperative model has had on their business development and on the Spanish health system..

Cooperativa Profesionales, set up in 1970, was founded with the aim of reducing the economic precariousness faced at that time by health professionals in their retirement. The Panamanian cooperative recently launched the construction of the Hospital Profesional, a modern health centre located in Panama City.

The project is a new demonstration of the cooperative's commitment to the health and well-being of its members and Panamanian society as a whole. ■





The role of women in the practice of medicine

The feminisation of the healthcare professions in Spain is one of the most notorious developments in this sector in the last two decades, a factor that has contributed to a number of important changes in society.

by **Enric Ros**

M

any things have changed since, in 1882, the Catalan Dolors Aleu became the first woman in Spain to obtain a degree in medicine. Today, anyone who has the opportunity to visit a faculty of health sciences can see that female students are in the majority in class. Last year, a report by the Ministry of Education estimated the number of women choosing to study medicine at 68.7 %. In Biomedicine the figure rises to 75 % and in Biochemistry it is 65.8 %. Male students, on the other hand, continue to opt more frequently for technology-related degrees, such as Computer Science (87 %) or Telecommunications (77 %); an academic and professional sector in which parity still seems to be an unresolved matter.

There are several reasons for this change in trend in the healthcare world which, in fact, began quite a few years ago. The main one, of course, has to do with the transformations that Spanish society has been undergoing, progressively, towards equal opportunities. The science historian Teresa Ortiz-Gómez, in her study *Las mujeres y la actividad científica en los siglos XIX y XX* (1999), showed that the first half of the 1990s was a key period, when there was a continuous increase of around 5 %, which meant that in 1995 there were already 61.80 % of female students enrolled in medical school.

As Dr. Silvia Martínez Nadal, paediatrician and neonatology assistant at Hospital de Barcelona, explains, "many young women of my generation were educated in full equality. In my case, medicine was my vocation from a very young age. So when the time came to choose university studies, I had no doubts about which path I should take". Certainly, the vocational factor plays a very important role in the medical profession. In the words of Dr. Lúdia Martínez Fijo, ►►►

▶▶▶ assistant doctor at the General Surgery Department of Hospital de Barcelona, "many women have a more developed capacity for caring and concern for others than men, and this has an influence on their decision to choose the health sector". In my own particular case, the desire to contribute to society led me to consider international cooperation first, which eventually led me to choose medicine".

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY LIFE RECONCILIATION

To become a practising doctor, it is necessary to first go through years of study and specialisation, which can involve a large number of personal sacrifices. Dr. Susana Sánchez Molina, an urologist at the HLA Moncloa University Hospital in Madrid, points out that, "in the past, this seemed to be difficult to reconcile with motherhood. But, after a certain point, many young women decided not to accept this and made all the efforts and sacrifices necessary to achieve their

In the picture, some of the current data on the situation of feminisation of the medical sector in Spain.

professional goals. This has also been helped by a change in sensitivity among the new generations, who began to share the household tasks and family care.

Motherhood is a crucial issue, which continues to have an impact on the employment situation of women. A study published in March 2022 by the association Metges de Catalunya, in which 685 female doctors took part, confirms that 74% of those surveyed believe that having children has affected their career progression. The impact is evident both in terms of remuneration (especially due to reductions in working hours or on-call time, currently requested by 70% of women and only 30% of men) and in terms of access to management positions. In addition, 67% reported frequent difficulties in reconciling personal and professional life.

Dr. Martínez Fijo points out that professional training often causes women to delay having children. When women decide they are ready for it, "it is common for them to prioritise family life, which acts as a limiting factor for their professional career to continue advancing and to aspire to positions of greater responsibility. Many women have found themselves in the position of having to choose, while men, who can delay parenthood for biological reasons, do not have this pressure".

Obtaining the same credibility from patients as men has been another gradual achievement. Dr. Martínez Nadal explains that, in her case, she has not met people who prefer to be attended by a male colleague, although she is aware that this is something that still happens, especially in the older population, who may still have some prejudice. Dr. Sánchez Molina explains that she has occasionally seen people turn to the youngest male resident doctor in a conversation, instead of consulting the female doctor assigned to them. Martínez Fijo, for her part, points out that such behav- ▶▶▶

The struggle of pioneer women

Women had to face numerous obstacles, resulting from the prejudices of patriarchal culture, in order to gain access to medicine. The first to obtain an academic degree - in 1849 in the United States - was Elizabeth Blackwell. Before she was accepted to Geneva Medical College in New York, she was rejected by as many as 10 colleges. However, as the story is told, when the dean gave her the degree, she did not hesitate to bow down to it.

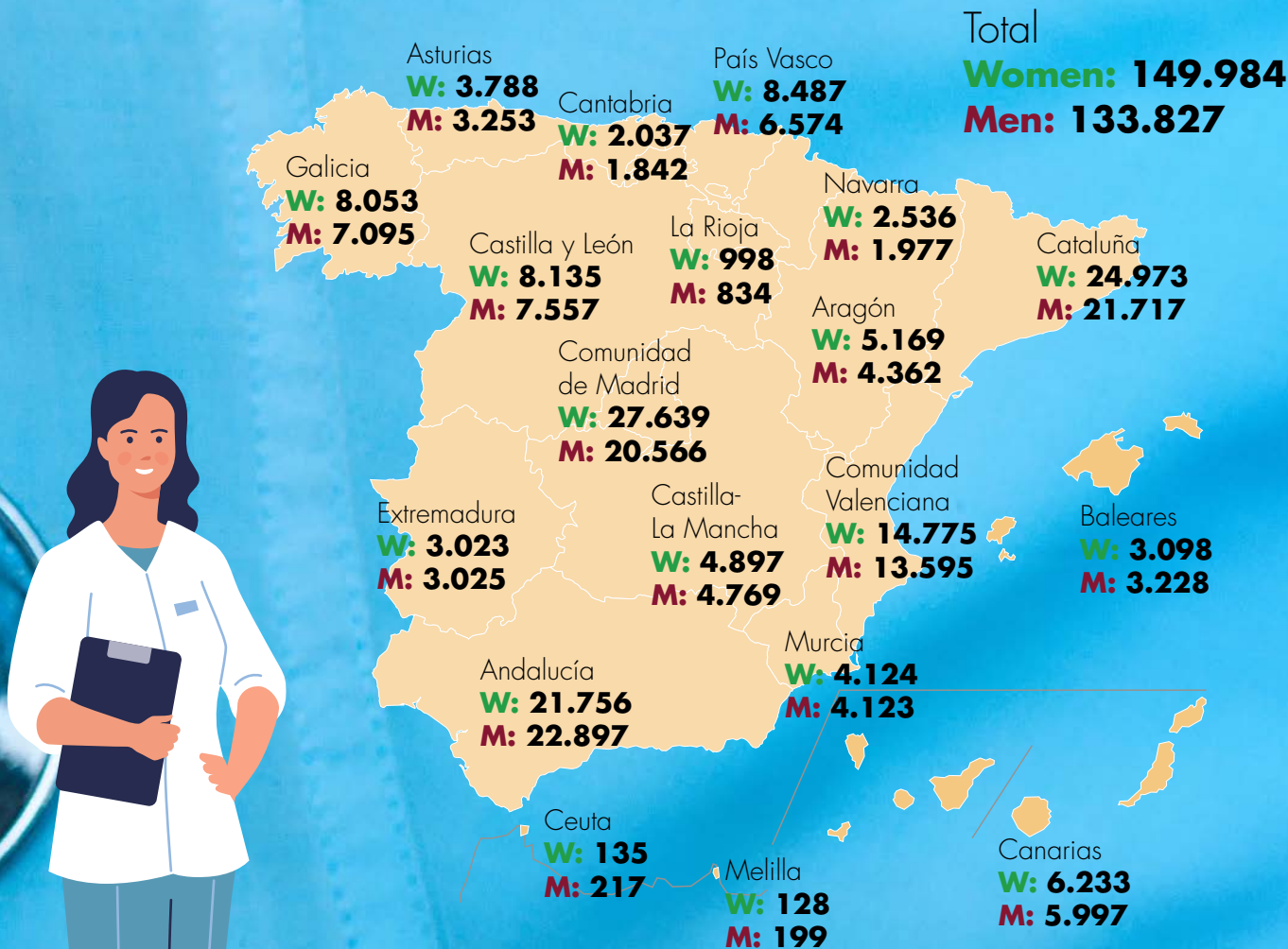
In Catalonia, Dolors Aleu finished her studies at the University of Barcelona in 1879, but did not obtain permission to take the final exam until 1882 (with an excellent grade). Elena Maseras from Tarragona finished her studies a year earlier, in 1878, and was also authorised to take the exam in 1882, a few months later than Aleu. Discouraged by the numerous obstacles, she ended up studying to become a teacher and worked as a teacher. Aleu, on the other hand, was able to obtain her doctorate in the same year that her degree was recognised. She specialised in gynaecology and paediatrics, and had her own private office in Barcelona for 25 years.

Analysis of female presence in medicine



The latest data published about the feminisation of the medical sector reveal that in recent years the number of female doctors in hospitals has reached its highest percentage ever and that the presence of women in management continues to grow progressively.

Doctors registered in each of Spain's autonomous communities by sex



Data obtained from the National Institute of Statistics according to the figures recorded in December 2021

Presence of women in the different areas of medicine

61 %

of doctors in Spain

23 %

of the presidents of the scientific societies that are members of the Federation of Spanish Scientific Medical Associations (FACME)

27 %

of the deans in medical colleges

26 %

of heads of department in medical universities

Data from the 'Women in Medicine in Spain (WOMEDS)' study, promoted by FACME, based on figures recorded in June 2021

►►► iour is "increasingly a vestige of the past". However, the statistics reveal that in Catalonia, 65% of female doctors consider that they are still given less credibility or authority than their male colleagues. In addition, 73% admit to having experienced a situation of sexism in their dealings with patients.

THE NEED TO BREAK THE "GLASS CEILING"

Fortunately, the old days when, in the health sector, women were very present in the field of nursing, but less present in the field of medicine, have been left behind. For some time now, we have found women in all positions and areas of the medical staff, although, as Dr. Martínez Nadal points out, "men still tend to choose more interventionist specialities, such as those involving regular surgical practice, and women are clearly in the majority in paediatrics, for example".

Dr. Lourdes Fernández de Bobadilla, a specialist in general surgery and digestive system and coordinator of the Breast Unit at HLA Moncloa University, says that "while it is true that in medical specialties female participation reaches 70%, there are publications that show that in the surgical specialties the percentage is lower, but reaching almost 50%, so it is clear that women are getting into what they really like". In any case, these old inertias are being abandoned with the incorporation of new generations: for example, when Dr Sánchez Molina began her urology residency more than a decade ago, she was the only woman in this speciality. Now, in many hospitals, female urologists are in the majority.

In December 2022, the Federation of Spanish Scientific Medical Associations (FACME) presented a pioneering study entitled *Women in Medicine in Spain* (WOMEDS), which analysed the percentage of female doctors reaching leadership positions in four different areas: healthcare, participation in

professional organisations (such as scientific societies, medical congresses or professional associations), in the academic world and in research. The results, compiled over the period 2019-2021, can in part be seen as encouraging. At the same time, they reflect that there is still much work to be done.

Despite being a majority in many health centres (in June 2021, 61% of doctors in public health care in Spain were women), the famous "glass ceiling" still remains. As Beatriz González, professor of health economics, explained at the presentation of the study, there is still a low percentage of women in charge of departments, ranging from 20.3% in Andalusia to 46.7% in Navarra. The figures for female heads of departments

» According to the WOMEDS study, despite being a majority in healthcare institutions (61% in 2021), the percentage of women in senior positions remains low.

range from 24.8 % in Aragon to 53.2 % in Navarra.

In Catalonia, the aforementioned study by Metges de Catalunya confirms that 53% of the women surveyed say that the positions of responsibility in their workplaces are held by men. The truth is that the Institut Català de la Salut, with a staff made up of 75% women, only has 30% of these professionals in management or leadership positions. This means giving up a lot of talent, especially if we take into account - as Dr.





Academy and Research are still not on an equal footing

The first Nobel Prize in Medicine for a woman did not arrive until 1947. She won it, together with her husband, Gerty Theresa Cori, for their studies on carbohydrate metabolism and the functions of enzymes in muscle tissue. Since then, many women have continued to publish relevant studies. However, the glass ceiling also exists in the field of scientific research. CSIC data from 2022 indicate that out of the 96 researchers from Spanish institutions that are among the top 1% most cited in the world, only 11.46% are women.

As the WOMEDS study shows, in 2021, around 50% of 4,377 members of research groups in Spain were women. However, only 26 % were group leaders. Also, in the 32 accredited health research institutes, only 3 of the 22 scientific directors are women. In the academic field, the figures are also insufficient: out of 13,567 medical teachers in 39 faculties, 45% are women. The fight for parity must, therefore, continue.

Some of the specialties with the highest percentage of feminisation are paediatrics, gynaecology and obstetrics, physical medicine and rehabilitation, and allergology.

Sánchez Molina points out - that "women tend to be particularly consistent and studious, so it is common for them to have the best CVs" of their promotions.

The figures show that achieving parity in all areas remains a challenge for the medical profession. However, it is fair to say that considerable progress has been made. The numbers of women entering our universities each year confirm that the vocation of female students for medicine remains strong. The same is true for those who are already practising. When we asked the interviewees what they would do if they had to go back in time to decide what career to study, all of them were clear: medicine would again be their first choice. ■

Concepción Giner, medical director of the Hospital HLA Vistahermosa

“In my first meeting I felt very lonely, but thirteen years later there are more women in the room”

by **Laura Martos**



Concepción Giner is a doctor specialized in microbiology. In 2005 she became the director of the analysis laboratory at HLA Vistahermosa and, in 2010, she assumed the medical direction of the hospital, where she is still working.

Dr. Giner studied at the University of Alicante and specialized in infectious diseases and clinical microbiology. She finished at a time when there were quite a few unemployed doctors and, by a “lift coincidence”, ended up creating the clinical microbiology laboratory at HLA Vistahermosa, in her hometown, Alicante. After assuming the position of general manager of analysis and clinical microbiology, they offered her the position of medical director of the hospital, thirteen years ago. During this time, she says, she has experienced the feminisation of hospitals as a natural evolution of the sector.

Is health care from a female perspective the same as from a male perspective?

For more than twenty years we have been working with the concept of differential morbidity, which is nothing more than the difference in pathologies, treatments and prognoses depending on gender. Cancer affects one in two men and one in three women; there is a gender prevalence. But chemotherapy has more side effects in the female sex. So, there is a gender-dependent development of health care activity and the knowledge about these differences by the staff makes health care more effi-

cient. If we talk about the patient's perception, it has been demonstrated that the female gender is recognised for its empathy, its tendency to care work or its great capacity for management and negotiation in groups. I believe that these are characteristics that we have as women, and that as doctors we apply them. But from a scientific point of view I would say that regardless of the fact that care, which is something more subjective, may be better for a particular gender, medical action is something objective and should only respond to the diagnosis.

But there has been a long-standing role association in which the doctor was a male figure.

This was a long time ago, but yes. I have seen the typical patient hospitalised at an advanced age, twenty years ago, who, when he saw you were coming in at the age of twenty-seven, fresh out of university, he would ask for the doctor to come and see him. Sometimes I even had a slightly more intoned encounter. But I would be lying to you if I told you that I have had great difficulties in this aspect and, if that was the case, they would have a hard time now, because in the hospital more than 60% of the staff are women.

In fact, according to FACME data, 61% of doctors in Spain are women. Why do you think this increase is due to?

There has always been a high percentage of women in the health professions, not only in medical education. It is likely that the gradual increase year after year of this percentage has something to do with a filter for entering into medical schools determined by grades which start counting from the age of 16. Women tend to reach maturity much earlier, and it may focus them on the understanding of their decision and therefore on the beginning to make the effort to reach it. And I also think that women tend to be more tenacious in their commitments, especially at this age.

Medicine is a path that requires efforts and women may now be prioritising their careers or even postponing motherhood...

I would not dare to make such a categorical statement. I have three brothers and at home I never noticed a difference in the choices we made. At home I did not find this problem and in my professional life I have not felt it either, but it is true that I have been in environments where there are women who have had to choose between



their career and motherhood, and it has been more difficult for me to meet men who have had to face this problem. I am also a mother and I know that it is complicated to have to choose, but I don't know if it is a question of gender or how motherhood is experienced. It used to be lived differently and now there are many men who understand fatherhood as something more than just having children.

However, women continue to ask for a reduction in their working hours in order to balance work and family life.

I also have the feeling that it is not socially understood that women decide to have children in the same way that men do, for example by leaving them with caregivers, if they have the opportunity. It is quite another thing if you decide, on a personal basis, to devote your-

self completely to your children. Then, even if you don't want to, you are paralysed professionally, at least for a few years. And, obviously, if there is no family or financial support, the complexity of this decision is greater.

How has the management of your position changed over the years?

I have been in the medical management profession for thirteen years and I would never have imagined what has happened in all this time. Digital medical records, the changes between public and private healthcare, the extremely important current technological revolution, the evolution in medication, genetics, the world pandemic... When Dr. Ivorra gave me the job I could never have imagined a future like this, but my motto has always been the same: knowledge, maximum implication

The HLA Vistahermosa team has 60% female staff and a higher representation in positions of responsibility in the specialities.

and teamwork. And in the case of feminisation, it is not done on purpose, but in my hospital most of the people responsible of the specialised units are women, and it is not because it has been intended to be so.

Almost thirty years ago you were a young woman in a position of great responsibility. How do you see the access of young women to positions with a significant influence in today's hospital structures?

Although Spanish healthcare is considered as one of the most feminised in Europe, data still confirm that men are three times more numerous than women in positions of responsibility and management. In the past, you would go to any hospital and the manager or director was a man of an older age. When I arrived I was so anxious to do well that I felt it more like a call for help than a victory. At the first meeting I remember feeling very lonely, but thirteen years later there are more women and more young women in the room. And I think the future looks very positive for us.

What do you think you can do in terms of women's representation in this sector in the meantime?

Being the medical director of HLA Vistahermosa puts me in a position of representation, as well as responsibility. I like going to interviews and events and being linked to my city, Alicante. I feel that the fact that I go, as a woman, is a certain way for people to normalise the presence of women in positions of responsibility. If in the past it was always men, I feel honoured to be able to assume this position of representation now, as a demonstration that things are changing. And, more than as a woman, as a person, I also look for the best teams, without being conditioned by gender. ■



Paradises within reach

MALTA & GOZO

Only two hours by plane separate us from these exotic islands where an impressive historical and cultural legacy tinged with mystery, some of the best beaches in the continent and many charming proposals await us.

by **Neus Duran**

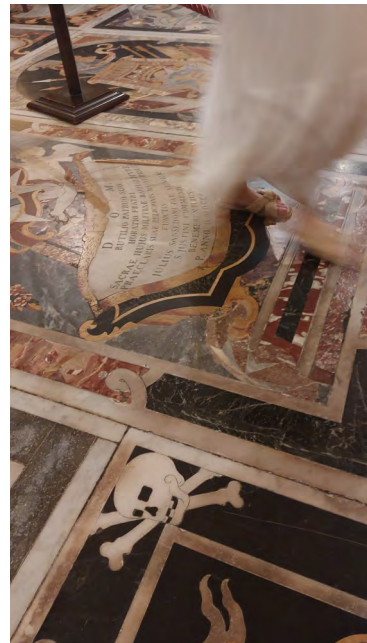
Marrakech is perhaps the exception, but it is difficult to find destinations that can compete with Malta when combining exoticism and proximity. With many affordable direct flights from Barcelona and Madrid, it's a perfect getaway to immerse yourself in its wild nature. And also, of course, the rich legacy left by its turbulent past; a glance at its geographical location is enough to understand how strategic it was as a disputed location. The result is the fusion of cultures that today permeates everything from its unique language to its surprising cuisine, a fusion of Sicilian, local and Middle Eastern flavours.

As a result of its ancient past, the islands are also fortified with impressive fortifications, starting with the walled capital, Valletta, built by the Knights of St. John. To hold off the Ottomans, Charles I (of England) handed over the islands permanently to these bastions of Christianity, who, as the only payment, had to give the emperor a prized falcon

for falconry every year.

Surrounded by giant walls that reflect the magnitude of the onslaught it had to withstand, Valletta is a tiny, grid-like, colourful city that takes just a few hours to explore. Must-see sights include the opulent Co-cathedral of St John, which contains three paintings of Caravaggio among its treasures. It's also worth to visit the panoramic Barrakka Gardens and the San Telmo's Fort, which was the dreadful prison used in the film *The Midnight Express*.

Leaving the capital behind, it is recommended to rent a car to explore the rest of the island as well as the fascinating Gozo, which is connected to Malta by ferries that depart every half hour. By car, you will soon reach cities where time seems to have stood still, such as Mdina and Rabat, as well as the spectacular Blue Grotto, where you can sail among sea caves that are bathed in a play of astonishing reflections of light. Nearby, the lively fishing village of Marsaxlokk is



Neus Duran

an excellent choice for a *lampuki*, one of the most popular fish dishes in Maltese cuisine, or an *aljotta*, a fish soup similar to bouillabaisse. It's also the best place to see the country's traditional fishing boats - the *luzzu* -



Order of Malta. Four hundred knights of the Order are buried under the marble floors of the opulent Co-cathedral of St. John.

The salt pans of Qbajjar, in the north of Gozo, stretch for three kilometres and they can be explored on foot or by car.





painted in a garish combination of colours and adorned with the eyes of Osiris, the Phoenician symbol of protection.

A haunting experience is to visit the Hypogeum of Hal Saflieni, an ancient underground necropolis carved out of the rock with such mysterious spaces as the Well of the Snakes. Even more disturbing can be attending an exorcist mass held once a mon-

In Marsaxlokk, a picturesque fishing village, a market with the daily catch, including sharks, is held on Sundays. On the right, Valletta.

th at Our Lady of the Sorrows in the south of the island to pray against witchcraft and curses. It is the country with the highest concentration of exorcists in the world, and they have even been broadcasted on television.

Those who are travelling with their families will enjoy Popeye's Village, a fictitious village created for the filming of Robert Altman's *Popeye*, which is now a popular theme park. The country, known as the Hollywood of the Mediterranean, has hosted hundreds of productions, so throughout the trip you'll find scenery you'll recognise from the big and small screen, such as *Game of Thrones*, *Troy* and *Gladiator*.

Gozo, wild beauty

More rural, quieter and more unspoilt than its big sister, the island of Gozo is likely to be the most pleasant surprise of the trip. You'll find rugged cliffs, red sandy beaches and charming towns such as the capital, Victoria, with an impressive, recently restored citadel overlooking the

city from a hilltop. Don't miss Dwejra Bay, a charming little fishing enclave with a restaurant serving excellent local food, and the Blue Hole, a 26-metre-deep hole that's a real treat for snorkelers. It's not the only one you'll find in Gozo, where waters are considered among the best in the world for diving and where you can see barracuda (Crocodile Rock), seahorses (Wied Il-Gas-hri) and sunken ships.

Another unique experience on the island is the three-kilometre walk around the Qbajjar salt flats, exploited since Roman times; a staircase carved out of the rock leads to hidden and secluded coves where you can take a dip.

The icing on the cake is a trip to the tiny island of Comino, just 3.5 square kilometres and located between Malta and Gozo. It's a very pleasant bird sanctuary for hikers, but what really makes it worth a visit is the Blue Lagoon, a natural pool of an intense turquoise colour where you can take a dreamy dip in the sea. ■



Neus Duran

A LOOK BACK AT THE GREAT TENNIS MILESTONES

On 22 April 1968 John Clifton and Owen Davidson officiated the first match of tennis' Open era. Since then, great men and women players have toured the world rankings and the four Grand Slam courts. Today we look back at some of the names that are now part of history.

by **Compartir**

Until the sixties, professional tennis players were banned from participating in the biggest events of the season such as the Davis Cup and the Grand Slams - and, of course, the Olympic Games - competitions open to *amateurs* who were not being subsidised to play, i.e. who had no promoter behind them. In recent years, however, many *amateurs* began to be paid for their activities and the possibility was raised that both competitors could play together.

That first match took place on 22 April 1968 on a hard court in Bournemouth (UK). Among other players, Mark Cox was one of the *amateurs* who stood out, defeating Pancho Gonzales and Roy Emerson, two professionals of the moment. The final, however, was between two of the pros, Rod Laver and Ken Rosewall, who had switched categories years before and are now considered two world-renowned tennis players. Meanwhile, the women's tournament pitted an *amateur*,

Virginia Wade, against a professional, Winnie Shaw, in the final, and she won.

Serena Williams and The big Three

There is a clear difference in the historical background of the great legends of men's and women's tennis. In the women's game, some of the most famous names are Martina Navrátilová, Steffi Graf, Lindsay Davenport, Monica Seles, Venus Williams and Chris Evert. In 1999 there was a very controversial final between the victory of Steffi Graf - the only sportswoman in the world to win a Golden Grand Slam, at the age of 19 - and Martina Hingis, who was reigning at that time in the WTA.

Soon after, both would retire and give way to Serena Williams, who had won her first Grand Slam at the US Open in 1997 at the age of 17, proclaiming herself the greatest player of all time for two whole decades.

This title, however, has been a historic dispute in men's tennis, with legends such as Jimmy Connors, Björn Borg and Manolo Santana. Since the early 2000s it has been disputed between Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic, who has

Ranking ATP/WTA 2023

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Novak Djokovic | 1 Aryna Sabalenka |
| 2 Carlos Alcaraz | 2 Iga Świątek |
| 3 Daniil Medvédev | 3 Coco Gauff |
| 4 Holger Rune | 4 Jessica Pegula |
| 5 Stefanos Tsitsipas | 5 Elena Rybakina |

just beaten Williams in the number of Grand Slams, becoming the male tennis player with the most cups in this tournament. Before his impressive presence, the ATP ranking already included other big names such as Pete Sampras, Andre Agassi and Spaniards such as Juan Carlos Ferrero. However, the golden age of the sport has been lived with the confrontation of these three players, who still continue generating debate. Making an objective comparison, Federer retired in 2021 with 31 Grand Slam finals played, winning 20 of them; Nadal, known for his expertise on clay, which led him to conquer Roland Garros in 2005 at the age of 19, has par-

has just won his second Grand Slam at just 20 years of age, competing directly with Djokovic for the top position in an ATP that also counts with the names of Medvedev and Tsitsipas. The player from Murcia has already faced the Serb on four occasions, winning two times, one of them in the last Wimbledon final. ■

ticipated in 30 finals, winning 22 of them; and Djokovic, on the other hand, has faced 35 finals and won 24 of them.

Young faces in tennis

Fifty-five years since the Open era began, and this 2023 has been a cession in many respects. On the women's category, Iga Świątek, just 22, and Aryna Sabalenka, 25, are in the midst of a battle to rule the WTA. Sabalenka, who reached the final of the last US Open, has been proclaimed first in *rankings* after reaching the final of the tournament, where she lost against Coco Gauff. Despite this latest result, Iga Świątek is still the active tennis player with the most Grand Slam victories.

In men's category, last year we were surprised by the appearance on the scene of Carlos Alcaraz, who

Top 10 tennis players with most Grand Slams in

Novak Djokovic: 24 Grand Slam, comprising 10 Australia Open, 3 Roland Garros, 7 Wimbledon and 4 US Open.

Margaret Court: 24 Grand Slam, comprising 11 Australia Open, 5 Roland Garros, 3 Wimbledon and 5 US Open.

Serena Williams: 23 Grand Slam, comprising 7 Australia Open, 3 Roland Garros, 7 Wimbledon and 6 US Open.

Rafa Nadal: 22 Grand Slam, comprising 2 Australia Open, 14 Roland Garros, 2 Wimbledon and 4 US Open.

Steffi Graf: 22 Grand Slam comprising 4 Australia Open, 6 Roland Garros, 7 Wimbledon and 4 US Open.

Roger Federer: 20 Grand Slam, comprising 6 Australia Open, 1 Roland Garros, 8 Wimbledon and 5 US Open.

Helen Wills Moody: 19 Grand Slam, comprising 0 Australia Open, 4 Roland Garros, 8 Wimbledon and 7 US Open.

Chris Evert: 18 Grand Slam, comprising 2 Australia Open, 7 Roland Garros, 3 Wimbledon and 6 US Open.

Martina Navrátilová: 18 Grand Slam, comprising 3 Australia Open, 2 Roland Garros, 9 Wimbledon and 4 US Open.

Pete Sampras: 14 Grand Slam, comprising 2 Australia Open, 0 Roland Garros, 7 Wimbledon and 5 US Open.

WE ARE WHAT WE READ

by **Laura Martos**

Reading is a part of the comprehensive development of human beings and it becomes a learning habit that we adopt in childhood because of its multiple benefits for brain development and mental health in general. In fact, recent studies claim that six months of reading, at any age, can change the deepest structures of our brain.

When we are young, one of the first things we learn is reading and writing, establishing a first contact through illustrations. This type of reading helps children to develop their imagination and to learn about the world around them. It also improves their vocabulary and concentration time, as well as accelerating the process of communicative management to learn to express their ideas and feelings. But, what makes all this possible?

The human brain does not initially have a specific area dedicated to reading. In fact, what we know today as reading emerged some six thousand years ago, a long time after the brain

had already fulfilled other basic intellectual functions. Therefore, reading is not something the brain is genetically “designed” for, but it is designed to adapt and restructure itself to new situations through neuroplasticity.

According to the study *La lectura desde la neurociencia*, written by Dr. David Ezpeleta Echávarri, this ability allows neurons to read letters and words, and over time to automatize these actions, building the basis of reading. As the



document explains, the brain mechanism that is set in motion when reading is as follows: “[It] activates, first, the visual cortex to process information consisting of symbols, which are recognised in certain areas of the brain as letters, other areas of the brain put these letters together and recognise them as sets that constitute words and then contact with other areas that provide meaning to these words and groups of words in order to activate the language areas and generate understanding”. Furthermore, neuroplasticity is not only limited to childhood, but also plays an important role at different stages of life cycle, so that the process of learning to read is long and it does not end once we have learned to read.

It is often said that “reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body”, and the truth is that reading enriches, trains and exercises it directly as if it was a muscle. While reading, we force our brain to think, order ideas, interrelate concepts and use our memory and imagination, improving our intellectual capacity. Among other benefits, reading for just six minutes can reduce

heart rate, and it is an effective way to reduce stress in everyday situations and combat insomnia. In addition, reading fiction can increase functional connectivity between areas of the brain involved in emotional processing, improving empathy skills and interpersonal relationships.

Read to live longer

A key benefit that should encourage us to introduce reading into our daily habits is its direct relationship with cognitive reserve. All culture-related knowledge (thinking, listening to music, reading...) has a brain impact that affects changes in cortical connectivity and the structures that connect them, directly increasing our cognitive reserve. This reserve is a concept that is tied to the quantity and quality of those connectivities that we create over the years, and is the main tool that the brain will use in its struggle against time and cognitive decline. If a person is genetically predisposed to suffer from a degenerative disease, cognitive reserve can slow down the appearance of the first symptoms, even to the point where the individual dies before they appear. The importance of reading in supporting this process is essential, especially in stimulating certain areas of the brain in adulthood. Daily reading can improve, for example, verbal memory and concentration, two elements of great importance in age-related cognitive decline.

On the other hand, many people lose the habit of reading as they get older, mainly because they lose their visual capacity, which makes it difficult for them to carry out this activity. A study by the National Library of Medicine, however, states that the brain has a better ability to concentrate if it has to decipher words and figures that it does not perceive so clearly, so that the intellectual exercise is actually greater and even more beneficial as it involves a greater effort. ■

4 keys to cultivate a reading habit



According to the British Psychological Society (BPS), a habit takes about 59 days to become automatic, i.e. an average of 2 months. To achieve this, BPS states that implementing routine and time-based signals increases the chances of integrating the habit more effectively into everyday life. Some recommendations for cultivating the habit of reading include:

- Replace screen time with reading time, especially on mobile devices, which represents an average of 3 hours and 43 minutes.
- Start with fast-paced and easy-to-understand novels, and stop reading without fear if you are not enjoying it.
- Set a regular reading frequency. According to the most recent studies, a couple of minutes a day is enough to generate significant brain activity.
- Create reading goals, whether by time, pages or number of books. According to statistics, fifteen minutes a day can read an average of a thousand books in a lifetime.



STRENGTHENING THE SYSTEM

Ginger shots: an immune ally

When the seasons change, it is essential to strengthen the immune system with a diet that includes foods that are rich in vitamins, minerals and probiotics. Ginger is one of them.

When autumn arrives, colds reappear due to changes in temperature and the cold. To avoid them, it is necessary to supplement a healthy diet with foods that protect the immune system. Ginger shots are concentrated drinks made from fresh ginger root. Their composition may vary according to the recipe - while some are just fresh ginger juice, others mix lemon juice, orange juice, turmeric or other substances - and they are sold in minimal volumes due to their intense and spicy taste. Among its many benefits, ginger is a remedy for gastrointestinal disorders; it is helpful to reduce bloating due to its substances that accelerate the decomposition and evacuation of gases, it also improves digestion, and it accelerates the metabolism. It is commonly recommended for the treatment of nausea, as well as a natural anti-inflammatory and antioxidant. It acts as an analgesic due to gingerol and phenol, as well as being rich in potassium, zinc, calcium, magnesium and vitamins B6, C and D. ■



....DISCONNECTION.....

Book

La salud digital

Dr. Jaime de Barrio and Julio Jesús Sánchez

The Health Tech collection, directed by the president of Atrys Health, Santiago de Torres, explores the transformation and innovations in topics of great relevance to the health sector. On this occasion, the collection presents a critical reading on the use and benefits for patients and professionals of new technologies and trends, including digital therapy-based care.



Series

Painkiller

Netflix

This six-episode miniseries shows how Richard Sackler (Matthew Broderick) used the pharmaceutical company Purdue Pharma to turn oxycodone into a drug that successfully made its way onto the black market. A fictional drama that explains the US opioid crisis, which involved 68,630 overdose deaths in 2020.



App

WeWard

iOS and Android

WeWard is an app that combats sedentary lifestyles by rewarding daily physical activity. With the aim of encouraging its users to walk the 10,000 steps recommended by the WHO to stay healthy, it converts each step into a digital currency, exchangeable for offers, donations to associations or euros, depending on the level reached.



Y, de repente, llegó el susto.
Y cuando te recuperaste,
llegaron también otras cosas:

Llegó volver a miraros a los ojos,
y los paseos largos,
y esa conversación honesta con tu hermana.

Llegó el momento de leer todos esos libros
que te esperaban,
y bailar en la cocina un martes por la mañana,
y sentarte a comer.

Llegó tu nueva bici,
y las sobremesas con tu padre.

Y descubrir que el árbol que siempre estuvo en tu
calle es un almendro y da una flor preciosa en marzo
o que el panadero tiene un hijo que es un
as en matemáticas.

Llegó jugar con tus hijos pensando en jugar
con tus hijos.

Llegó esa nueva forma de tomarte la vida.

¿Y si no esperamos al susto
para vivir como queremos vivir?



mejor

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