

Don't let the 'culture of waste' affect you

Address to the participants in the congress promoted by the Italian Society of Hospital Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Services of Health Authorities

Pope Francis
14 October 2021

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I would like to thank the President of the Italian Society of Hospital Pharmacy and the Pharmaceutical Services of Health Authorities for his words on behalf of you all. Thank you! You have come from all over Italy for your Conference, representing different realities. The Conference is first and foremost an opportunity for you to exchange views, but it is also an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of the national public health system, an essential element in guaranteeing the common good and the social growth of a country. And all this in the context of the pandemic, which has changed and will change the way we plan, organise and manage health and healthcare. In this regard, I would like to point out three paths on which to continue your efforts.

The first is taken from the figure of the innkeeper in the parable of the Good Samaritan: he is asked to take in the wounded man and care for him until the Samaritan returns (cf. Lk 10:35). In this character we can see two significant aspects of the work of the hospital pharmacist: daily routine and hidden service. These are aspects common to many other jobs, which require patience, constancy and precision, and which do not have the gratification of appearances, which have little visibility. Daily routine and hidden service have little visibility, shall we say: little visibility. Precisely for this reason, if they are accompanied by prayer and love, they generate "everyday holiness". Because without prayer and without love – as you well know – this routine becomes arid. But with love, done with love and prayer, it leads to the holiness "next door": anonymous saints who are everywhere because they do what they have to do well.

The second way concerns the specific dimension of the hospital pharmacist, namely his or her professional role, or post-graduate specialisation. Together with the clinician, it is the hospital pharmacist who researches, experiments, proposes new routes; always in immediate contact with the patient. This involves the ability to understand the disease and the patient, to personalise medicines and dosages, sometimes dealing with the most complex clinical situations. In fact, the pharmacist is able to take into account the overall effects, which are more than just the sum of the individual drugs for different diseases. Sometimes – depending on the structure – there is an encounter with the sick person, other times the hospital pharmacy is one of the invisible departments that makes it all work, but the person is always the recipient of your care.

The third way concerns the ethical dimension of the profession, in two respects: personal and social.

On an individual level, the pharmacist, each one of you, uses medicinal substances which can become poisons. Here it is a question of exercising constant vigilance, so that the goal is always the patient's life in its entirety. You are always at the service of human life. In some cases this can lead to conscientious objection, which is not disloyalty, but on the contrary fidelity to your profession, if validly motivated. Today there is something of a tendency to think that perhaps it would be a good way to approach conscientious objection. But this is the ethical intimacy of every health professional and this should never be negotiated, it is the ultimate responsibility of health professionals. It is also a denunciation of the injustices done to the detriment of innocent and defenceless life. [1: Cf Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers (for Health Pastoral Care), New Charter for Health Care Workers (2017) no. 60.] It is a very delicate issue, which requires both great competence and great rectitude. In particular, I have had occasion to return to the subject of abortion recently. [2: Cf Press Conference

during the return flight from Bratislava (15 September 2021).] You know that I am very clear about this: it is a homicide and it is not licit to become an accomplice. Having said that, our duty is to be close to people, our positive duty: to be close to situations, especially women, so that they do not come to think of the abortion solution, because in reality it is not the solution. Then after ten, twenty, thirty years, life sends you the bill. And you have to be in a confessional to understand the price of this, which is so hard.

This was the personal ethical level. Then there is the level of social justice, which is so important: “Health strategies, aimed at the pursuit of justice and the common good, must be economically and ethically sustainable”. [3: Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers (for Health Pastoral Care), New Charter for Health Care Workers (2017), no. 92.] Certainly, in the Italian National Health Service, great space is occupied by the universality of access to care, but the pharmacist – even in the hierarchies of management and administration – is not a mere executor. Therefore, management and financial criteria are not the only element to be taken into consideration. The throwaway culture must not affect your profession. And this is another area in which we must always be vigilant. “God our Father gave us the task of protecting the earth – not for money, but for ourselves: for men and women. We have this task! Nevertheless, men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: it is the ‘culture of waste’”. [4: General Audience, 5 June 2013.] Even in the elderly: give half the medicines and your life is shortened... It is rejection, yes. This observation, which originally referred to the environment, applies even more so to human health.

The management of resources and care not to waste what is entrusted to the hands of each individual pharmacist take on not only an economic meaning, but also an ethical, I would say human, one: very human. Think of attention to details, to the purchase and conservation of products, to the correct use and application in those who are in urgent need. Think about the relationship with the various workers – the ward managers, nurses, doctors and anaesthetists – and with all the structures involved. I thank you for this visit, and I hope that you will be able to continue in your work, which is so human, so worthy, so great and so often so silent that no one notices. Thank you very much! May God bless you all. And pray for me. Thank you!