

Deepen the doctor-patient relationship

2 October 2025

Address to representatives of the “Confederación Médica Latinoiberoamericana y del Caribe” (CONFEMEL)

Pope Leo XIV

2 October 2025

Let us begin with the sign of the Cross, by which we have all been saved: in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you!

Good morning, everyone, and welcome.

I am delighted to welcome you to the Vatican this morning. You belong to the “Confederación Médica Latinoiberoamericana y del Caribe”, the Latin American and Caribbean Medical Confederation, an organization representing over two million doctors who work to bring quality healthcare to every corner of your countries. Thank you for your tireless work.

Today, 2 October, the Church celebrates the Holy Guardian Angels. This memorial can help us to reflect on the doctor-patient relationship, which is based on personal contact and health care, just like, one might say, the angels who care for and protect us on our journey through life. This theme also reminds me of some of the words of Saint Augustine, who referred to Christ as a physician and as medicine. He is a physician because he is the word, and he is medicine because he is the word made flesh (cf. Sermon 374, 23). Certainly, the “word” and the “flesh” are fundamental; dialogue, communication and physical contact must always be present in the therapeutic relationship, beyond the instruments and tools used to treat illnesses.

As we read in the Gospel, Jesus healed several sick people. We could cite the case of the leper who, “kneeling, said to him, ‘If you will, you can make me clean’. Moved with pity, [Jesus] stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him: ‘I will; be clean’. And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean” (Mk 1:40-42). It is not a mechanical gesture; a personal relationship is established between the leper and Jesus. The one who could not be touched finds health and salvation in Jesus’ touch.

Likewise, there are many figures of doctors who have devoted their lives to their patients. Today, I would like to recall Blessed José Gregorio Hernández, one of the best-known doctors in Venezuela at the beginning of the twentieth century. I consider him a good example for you, as he was able to combine his advanced medical skills with his dedication to those most in need, which earned him the title of “doctor of the poor”.

In the light of these reflections, I invite you to continue to deepen your understanding of the importance of the doctor-patient relationship. A relationship between two people, with their bodies and their inner selves, with their history. This conviction also helps us shed light on the place of artificial intelligence in medicine: it can and should be a great help in improving clinical care, but nothing can take the place of the doctor, because you are, as Pope Benedict XVI said, “reserves of love, who bring serenity and hope to the suffering” (Angelus, 1 July 2012). The algorithm cannot substitute a gesture of closeness or a word of consolation.

Dear friends, you have great and stimulating challenges ahead of you, which must be faced with hope. As we conclude our meeting, I ask “Christ Jesus, our hope” (1 Tim 1:1) and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, to accompany you all on this pilgrimage that we all make towards the house of the Father. May God bless all of you. Thank you very much.

Let us conclude by asking for the Lord’s blessing upon you and all your colleagues. That relationship and that possibility of life and hope that you also offer to all your patients, to all the sick, are so important.