

**Carta ao Editor**

**OVERQUALIFIED, OVERLOOKED: THE CRISIS FACING BRAZIL'S HEALTH  
POSTGRADUATES**

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Dear editor,

A recent text published in *Nature*<sup>1</sup> provided a narrative of the unique challenges faced by older PhD students across various countries, including time constraints, financial struggles, family responsibilities, and an uncertain future in the job market. These issues are particularly relevant in Brazil, where the average age of doctoral graduates is 37 years<sup>2</sup>, underscoring a universal need for higher education reform.

Despite decades of growth, Brazil's postgraduate system, which serves over 320,000 students, is currently in crisis. While employment for master's and doctoral graduates has significantly outpaced that of those without advanced degrees, enrollment has dropped by 13% since 2019; despite a significant recovery in the past 3 years<sup>2</sup>. These statistics mask deeper structural problems, such as devalued research grants and programs that do not align with job market demands, contributing to underemployment and worsening mental health concerns among graduates.

The National Postgraduate Plan (PNPG) acknowledges an oversupply of qualified candidates and unsatisfactory results, despite efforts to restore scholarship values<sup>3</sup>. Far from criticizing the PNPG (which has delivered undeniable progress), this highlights the need for modernization - a challenge faced by all such graduate programs worldwide. There is an urgent need to enhance curricula with

essential technical and soft skills, like communication and teamwork. Reforms need to include implementing more targeted, inclusive, and supportive PhD programs, increasing flexibility, revamping evaluations, and expanding private sector job opportunities. These changes aim to make postgraduate education in Brazil, particularly for older students who embark on doctoral studies later in life, both viable and globally competitive, ensuring it supports the unique personal and professional journeys of its students.

In health sciences particularly, many professionals pursue doctoral degrees later in their careers, often focusing on service-oriented research tied to clinical protocols and healthcare processes - resulting in a more professional rather than purely academic profile<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, the basic and applied science emerging from these programs requires substantial infrastructure investments, underscoring the need for more targeted funding mechanisms by research agencies<sup>5</sup>. Such policies must not only address regional disparities but also accommodate the cultural and territorial diversity of a continental nation like Brazil, balancing academic rigor with professional demands while maintaining scientific excellence.

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## References

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