

2009 FIP CONGRESS in ISTANBUL, TURKEY – start your journey now!

This year, the FIP World Congress of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences will take place in the intriguing and cosmopolitan city of Istanbul, Turkey. Motivated by the desire for growth and encouraged by thousands of years of change, Turkey is ready and willing to make great strides in social, economical and political areas, with pharmacy being no exception. We have invited Halil Tekiner, a Community Pharmacist in Turkey and well-known for his involvement in FIP, to report on recent developments, current situations and future goals of Turkey's pharmacists.

We invite you to start your journey to Istanbul early by reading about the challenges and successes of your Turkish colleagues. Begin now, and continue with us at the FIP Congress!

COMMUNITY PHARMACY IN TURKEY

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As a long standing candidate for European Union membership since 1999, Turkey is rapidly changing. Although sometimes stepping on the gas and sometimes the brake, it has progressed in a variety of fields such as law, education and health, amongst others. This development can also be seen in the pharmacy profession and has brought about many changes as well as some new challenges in present times as compared to any other time in the history of the profession. Thus, the question that arises is how community pharmacists and patients, in particular, will respond to such change, and whether they are totally satisfied with the degree of change attained. I honestly believe that they are not satisfied at all.

FACTS & FIGURES

Total population of the country: 71,517,100
Pharmacists: 30,725
Community pharmacies: 24,119
Pharmacy schools: 14
Pharmacy students: 4,929
Inhabitants per pharmacist: 2,328
Inhabitants per pharmacy: 2,966

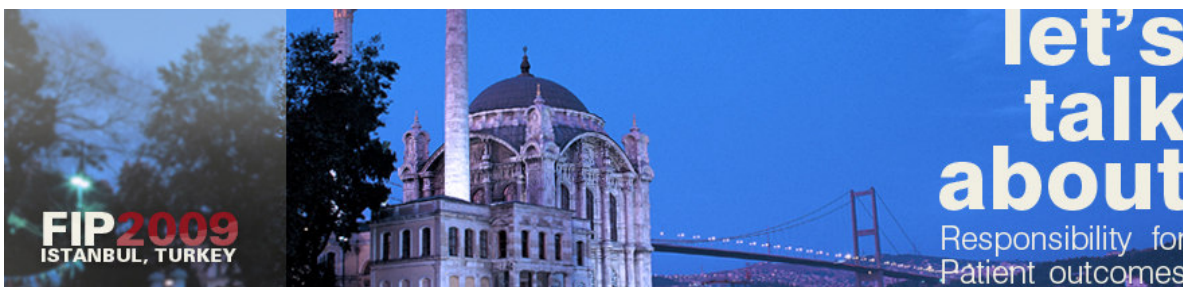
Turkish Pharmacists Association Records (TEB) 2008



A photo taken at the "That's Enough!" Pharmacy Demonstration on December 21, 2009 in Ankara, Turkey (Courtesy of the Turkish Pharmacists Association)

This was the reason why more than 32,000 people, including pharmacists, pharmacy students, pharmacy technicians, patients, and others attended a huge demonstration called "Artık Yeter!" (*That's Enough!*) on December 21, 2008, in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. This event was organized by the *Türk Eczacıları Birliği* (TEB, Turkish Pharmacists' Association), a national body that represents pharmacists from its 51 local chambers that is spread throughout the country. The reason behind this gathering was mainly the government's proposal to change some parts of the current Pharmacy Law no. 6197, and aggravate the terms of the annual contract signed with community pharmacists. In addition to removing some of the existing rights of the pharmacists (i.e., permitting the sale of OTC drugs at stores other than pharmacies) and adding some new proposals (i.e., collecting medical examination fees from each patient, which is the responsibility of the hospital staff). This proposal allowed community pharmacists to establish a commercial "partnership" with their colleagues, thus developing pharmacy chains, a move that Turkish pharmacists are strictly against.

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In fact, there were some other problems (and still are) that were cause for concern: there was a drastic increase in the number of pharmacists (almost 1,000 pharmacists graduate per year), which is likely to cause a serious unemployment problem in the near future as well as generate high rivalry among pharmaceutical professionals; lack of restrictions in the number of community pharmacies in each location; the negative effects of drug reimbursement delays on the financial stability of pharmacists; and the time wasted as a result of the large amount of paperwork.

However, as the proverb says, “every cloud has a silver lining.” After very long and tense negotiations with officials and thanks to the solidarity amongst pharmacists, the proposal was withdrawn and a suitable contract was signed on January 20, 2009.

The situation is not as bad as mentioned above. The past few years have also seen some positive outcomes, some of which are mentioned below:

- Patient prescriptions in pharmacies are being recorded via the Internet. This has resulted in medications being used more rationally, thereby preventing errors and reducing the cost of the drugs. Electronic prescriptions and patient “smart cards” are also underway as part of the e-health project.
- Two dimensional barcodes, known as *Data Matrix*, are being used on the boxes of pharmaceuticals for better product identification and tracking, which, in my opinion, is a crucial step in the fight against counterfeit medicines or medical swindles in the pharmacy business.
- The curriculum in pharmacy education has been completely updated, taking into consideration the different career opportunities in the pharmaceutical industry. The duration of the courses has been increased from 4 years to 5 years.
- Formal education for pharmacy technicians is now being offered (pharmacy technicians were previously not required to have such an education).
- The National Academy for Pharmacy and several other institutes were established under the TEB and have launched their own projects and educational programs, focusing on the specific needs of community pharmacists.

Nobody knows what the future will bring and what the next challenges will be. However, we are confident that the upcoming FIP World Pharmacy Congress shall provide us with a unique opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences at the international level. From this, we can learn and discuss issues related to pharmacy like the one mentioned above, make forecasts and prepare ourselves against possible pitfalls. So I am confident that any pharmacist willing to actively become involved in this process would find a fulfilling experience at the FIP Congress in Istanbul, 3-8 September 2009. I hope to see you there and together prepare for our future roles in pharmacy.



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