



March 14 Feast of Medicine and The Spirit of Medics

University of Health Sciences is both the first health-themed state university in Turkey and the greatest health university of the world. Our university was founded in the facilities built by Sultan Abdülhamit Han II with the vision, "Transitioning from the past into the future" and "Traditionalist but innovative", and with the mission of founding the first modern medical school, Mektebi Tıbbiye-i Şahane. Our university conducts educational activities in two cities - Istanbul and Ankara - in Turkey in addition to Somalia and Sudan campuses abroad and provides health education on an international level.

While it first served as a military medical school between 1903-1909, Mektebi Tıbbiye-i Şahane later became a civil medical school. The military Hospital of Haydarpaşa which was located opposite to these facilities, was linked to the school with an underground tunnel and rail system and used as a training hospital for the students.

After the World War I ended and the Mondros Armistice Agreement was signed in 1918, the Allies invaded İstanbul. While the ships of the invading forces were being deployed in the Marmara Sea, the medical students in Haydarpaşa were watching this scene from the windows of the school with sadness. Their instructor, Dr. Tefik Salim Sağlam turned to the students and told them not to worry, as the army of this nation had never been defeated.

However, the English forces had started to place their soldiers in the official institutions in İstanbul immediately, and had also invaded the buildings of the Mektebi Tıbbiye-i Şahane. The English soldiers emptied the dormitories of the boarding military students and decided to use that part of the building as their headquarters. They even confiscated the beds of the students. The students converted the loft into a dormitory and moved their mattresses there. Later on, this place was called "Hangar Palace" by the students, as a lot of students could only be accommodated in a very cramped area.

The English also forbade the military students to participate to lessons with their uniforms. As the sons of a nation that had just been out of the war, most of the military medics did not have any clothes to put on other than their uniforms. The students had to attend the classes in their pyjamas. This situation hurt the pride of the prospective military doctors of the soldier-nation.

The medics who were on the front line during the First World War, were uncomfortable with the occupation of their nation and being put in a dishonorable situation by the occupiers. Even though they wanted to resist the pressure that was put on them and to rebel, they chose to proceed cautiously due to the fact that people who raised little objections were being arrested and were being sent into exile by the occupation forces.

The medics who were seeking a way to react without making the situation worse, decided to hold a celebration meeting for the 92nd anniversary of the foundation of the Medicine School which started education in 1827.

The anniversary of the foundation of the School of Medicine had never been celebrated until that time. As occupation forces forbade students to be in groups, it could be only possible for students to come together only with the pretext of such a scientific-based program. On March 14, 1919 the students gathered in the conference hall of Ottoman University with their professors. They invited British, American and French Red Cross representatives and a French general who was in charge of Sanitary Inspection Department. The program started with the speech delivered by Mr. Kemal who was a medical student on a brief history of the school. In his speech, Mr. Kemal also stated the services of the Crimean Aziz Bey who started the medical education in Turkish instead of French and talked about the contributions of the other professors. Then, Dr. Memduh Necdet who studied medicine in the United States, stated that 607 Turkish, 240 Greek, 170 Armenian, 79 Jewish and 11 Serbian and Bulgarian students had graduated from the School of Medicine since its foundation. He also reminded the contributions of the School of Medicine to the First World War with figures. After pointing out the depressive situation in İstanbul, he ended his speech by saying "We have been here, and we will be here... İstanbul belongs to us because our independence is here..." After this statement he received a standing ovation. With this meeting, the medics demonstrated that they could come together under any circumstances. Also, they conveyed this very important message that they would not abandon their country to the occupiers. The anniversary of the opening of the School of Medicine continued to be celebrated in the following years. Medical students' fight for independence was not only limited to the Medical Feast. They also played a fundamental role in the independence of the country by supporting the initiation and success of the War of Independence.

Since 1919, the Medical Feast has been celebrated and every year on March 14, all medics continue to come together.

Just like our pioneer colleagues who reacted to the occupation on March 14, 1919 by raising the Turkish flag between the two clock towers of Mekteb-i Tıbbiye-i Şahane, with the same spirit and the same persistence, we raised our flag once again on the night of July 15, 2016 to resist the treacherous coup attempt. We have shown that medics will not surrender to any occupation and betrayal attempt.

Medics who rebelled and fought against the invasion of İstanbul and homeland, continue to be the guarantee of our independence with the same spirit.

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