Perspectives on Medical School Library Services in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This paper gives a brief overview of medical education in Turkey and shows the impact of established social, educational, and economic patterns upon current medical library services. Current statistical information is given on the twenty-two medical school libraries in Turkey. Principal problems and chief accomplishments with library services are highlighted and discussed.

TODAY, Turkey is a democratic nation of 52 million people, Islamic in tradition, but secular in its government and social institutions. Education is also secular and based on Western practices. Turkey is a member of NATO and a close friend of the Western alliance [1].

Turkish universities are considered autonomous institutions, although they are under the supervision of the Council of Higher Education. Within each university the faculties (schools) are headed by a dean who reports to the rector (president) of the university. The faculties are relatively independent units; each has its own administration and budget and often its own library. The medical faculties cooperate closely with the university faculties of pharmacy, dentistry, and child health as well as with the national public health programs of the Ministry of Health. The curriculum is similar to that of American medical schools. Upon successful completion of six years of medical training, the student must pass a national examination to earn the degree of Doctor of Medicine and the right to practice [2].

In 1986 there were twenty-two medical schools in Turkey, all but five of them established after 1960. The newest school, the Faculty of Medicine at Marmara University in Istanbul, was established in 1985. This school and the Faculty of Medicine at Hacettepe University in Ankara (the national capital) use English for instruction. The other medical schools continue to use Turkish [3].

In November 1981 the Turkish government passed a sweeping new reform-minded Higher Education Law intended to address some widely recognized problems in Turkish education and to meet the growing technical and scientific manpower requirements of the country. The law sought to ensure that the country's institutions of higher education serve national priorities; it also emphasized faculty accountability, expanded the number of universities, promoted research opportunities, and changed certain teaching methods [4]. This law will undoubtedly have a long-range impact upon all medical school libraries and do much to improve the situation. However, control by central authority remains a problem. Under this law, a newly established twenty-five-member Council of Higher Education acts as the principal governing body for all higher education. Thus, while control appears to have been taken away from the Ministry of Education, it nevertheless remains firmly in the hands of the national government. This ongoing strong central control may be a result of continued government concern about university faculty and staff who were actively involved in Communist and leftist activities prior to September 1980.

While the new law stresses academic freedom, faculty accountability, research, and revision of teaching methods, there are many in Turkey who question whether those aims have been accomplished. There is still much to be done in the way of reform. Consequently, few observers, Turkish or foreign, have much praise for the educational system as a whole [5–8].

MEDICAL LIBRARY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

In a Turkish medical school library survey conducted by Kalelioglu and Brennen in 1984–1985, a
number of important characteristics were observed [9]. In 1986 Blackwelder completed a guest lectureship tour of major medical school libraries in Turkey and reported her findings [10]. These two reports, personal trips to Turkey by the authors of this paper, and discussions held with Turkish medical librarians currently being toured by the authors of the Medical College of Wisconsin Libraries in Milwaukee prompt a number of observations about the present state of medical libraries in Turkey.

The mail survey conducted by Kalelioglu and Brennen between December 1984 and May 1985 identified twenty-four characteristics of Turkish medical school libraries. Of the twenty-two medical school libraries surveyed, eighteen returned the questionnaire. The questions were similar in content and scope to those in the Annual Statistics of Medical School Libraries in the United States and Canada [11]. Table 1 lists the libraries and several of their performance indicators. The complete survey report may be borrowed from the Medical College of Wisconsin libraries in Milwaukee.

Of the eighteen libraries that responded, Hacettepe University Medical School Library is by far the largest in budget, collection, and staffing. It is the premier medical center in Turkey, with major teaching, research, and patient care programs. Other medical centers noteworthy in terms of teaching and patient care programs are Istanbul University (both Çapa and Cerrahpaşa campuses), Ege University, Çukurova University, Erciyes University, and Ankara University, but none of these schools has a library that can be considered outstanding. In this group the largest number of periodical subscriptions held is 552 titles and the smallest is 208.

The largest acquisitions budget reported (1984–1985) was 99 million Turkish lira ($204,166 U.S.). However, in discussion with the assistant director of this library (Çukurova) it was learned that this

### Table 1


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Volumes</th>
<th>Journal Subscriptions</th>
<th>Acq. Budg. ($ U.S.)*</th>
<th>FTE Staff</th>
<th>Classification Systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Çukurova University</td>
<td>Adana</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>$204,166</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>LC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ankara University</td>
<td>Ankara</td>
<td>20,132</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>39,583</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hacettepe University</td>
<td>Ankara</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>135,416</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gazi University</td>
<td>Ankara</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gülhane Askeri Tip Akademisi</td>
<td>Ankara</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical School (Military)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akdeniz University</td>
<td>Antalya</td>
<td>3,150</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>6,250</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uludag University</td>
<td>Bursa</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>14,583</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dicle University</td>
<td>Diyarbakir</td>
<td>20,200</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>20,833</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dewey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trakya University</td>
<td>Edirne</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firat University</td>
<td>Elazığ</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atatürk University</td>
<td>Erzurum</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Dewey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anadolu University</td>
<td>Eskişehir</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27,083</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Istanbul University</td>
<td>İstanbul</td>
<td>55,119</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>15,625</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Çapa campus)</td>
<td>İstanbul</td>
<td>40,009</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>15,625</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cerrahpaşa campus)</td>
<td>İstanbul</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marmara University</td>
<td>İstanbul</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Haydarpaşa campus)</td>
<td>İstanbul</td>
<td>46,561</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>35,416</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ege University</td>
<td>İzmir</td>
<td>1,130</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dewey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dokuz Eylül University</td>
<td>İzmir</td>
<td>37,500</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>26,562</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erciyes University</td>
<td>Kayseri</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3,125</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dewey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selçuk University</td>
<td>Konya</td>
<td>9,870</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ondokuz Mayıs University</td>
<td>Sivas</td>
<td>2,248</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>52,083</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>NLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumhuriyet University</td>
<td>Trabzon</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karadeniz University</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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</tr>
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*1984 U.S.A. $1.00 = 480 Turkish Lira*
MEDICAL SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICES IN TURKEY

was actually the acquisitions budget for the entire university library. The exact figure for the biomedical portion was not available. Hacettepe University Medical Library, with a $135,416 materials fund, may have the largest acquisitions budget among Turkish medical schools. Turkish medical school libraries are underfunded not only for acquisitions but for equipment, supplies, salaries, and other operational expenses. Given the relatively high cost of acquiring medical books and journals, it is difficult to see how these libraries can adequately support the teaching, research, and patient care functions of their parent institutions.

Turkish librarians view this chronic underfunding as a major impediment to the improvement of biomedical information services in the country. Because of the state of the Turkish economy, there does not appear to be any short-term solution to the problem. While the economy of the country has grown enormously since 1980, a large part of the government’s income supports the Turkish military establishment (the second-largest within NATO), the improvement of social services, and the construction of a nationwide technical and industrial infrastructure. Library funding levels show where the government and the university administrations have ranked library services in their list of priorities. There are, however, some outstanding exceptions. The administrations of the Medical Faculty at Hacettepe University in Ankara and the new medical school at Marmara University in Istanbul are committed to creating centers of academic excellence that include first-rate library services. These institutions apparently recognize the link between superior library services and quality health care.

Turkish medical librarians are well trained in traditional aspects of library science, no doubt due in part to the presence of three established library schools in Turkey. The standards and techniques taught at these schools, although somewhat traditional, appear to be adequately applied in the work place. There is, however, a notable lack of computer skills. As of September 1986, only Hacettepe University Medical Library was using a computer. It planned to use its recently acquired Data General microcomputer for mounting several database management programs. None of the libraries have online access to common databases available from such vendors as OCLC, MEDLARS, BRS, SDC, and DIALOG. Retrieval of bibliographic data within the library continues to be done manually. Off-site database search services are available, however, through YÖK (Yüce Türk Eğitim Kurumu—Council of Higher Education) in Ankara, WHO in Geneva, DIMDI in Cologne, West Germany, and the Medical College of Wisconsin Libraries in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The larger medical schools use these services regularly.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL TONE OF LIBRARY EDUCATION: IMPACT ON MEDICAL LIBRARIES

Turkish librarians realize the need for continuing education to update their skills and knowledge, but given the library economics, there are few opportunities for them to do so. There is what might be called a “technology lag.”

Although the universities in Turkey are semiautonomous, they are, like all education in Turkey, nevertheless under the control of a central government whose educational policies are largely influenced by the Ministry of Education. Although the new Education Law of 1981 has taken control of higher education from the Ministry, tight central governmental control and a conservative approach to education remain. This is reflected in the traditional teaching methods that emphasize authoritarianism and rote learning rather than creativity and original thinking.

The librarian who works in a university is a government employee at a somewhat low civil servant level. In such a setting, the librarian is typically given little authority, few promotional opportunities, and no financial incentives (such as merit salary increases). Furthermore, the chronic lack of funding for library acquisitions and equipment has left most librarians discouraged, passive, and with little motivation. In such an environment there is little possibility for developing libraries into centers of academic excellence in the academic medical center. Despite these problems, the library schools in Turkey have had success in attracting well-qualified candidates to their programs and placing their graduates in medical school libraries and private corporate libraries throughout the country. Another problem is that the newer library school graduates prefer not to work in university libraries unless they are offered an academic post that commands a higher salary—a rarity. As a result, many of the most qualified graduates are attracted to private industry; this creates a shortage of professional librarians in the universities.

PROBLEMS IN LIBRARY SERVICES

Library service in Turkey differs from that in the United States because of different economic sys-

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tems, different cultural values, and the fact that in Turkey the tradition of modern library services is relatively new. Also implicated is the “technology lag.”

Libraries are often viewed by patrons and medical center administrators as repositories of information, and librarians as passive intermediaries in its transfer and interpretation. They are perceived as playing a relatively unimportant role in medical decision making. Medical students rely to a great extent on lectures and lecture notes; neither students nor faculty have good habits of library use.

Because most Turkish librarians have received traditional library training, many of the services they offer are similar to those found in American medical libraries. However, lack of adequate funding for the libraries and lack of demand have resulted in an absence of certain standard services or their presence only at a minimum level. For example, traditional reference service is available, but because the educational process itself generally does not encourage students to ask questions, there are relatively few reference queries. Turkish librarians have not established a tradition of marketing their expertise and making known their skills in information science.

**Bibliographic Retrieval**

Bibliographic retrieval of information from online databases is not yet available in medical libraries in Turkey. For example, at Hacettepe Medical School Library, the reference librarian handles thirty to fifty bibliographic requests per week by manually searching both *Index Medicus* and *Science Citation Index*. One or two articles judged to be significant by the librarian are photocopied and sent with the bibliographic citations to the requester. It takes so much time to hand-collect this information that few other services are offered, and bibliographic searches are limited to faculty and graduate students.

**Interlibrary Loan**

Because the formal structure necessary for providing interlibrary loan service (union lists, standardized forms, and formal/informal agreements among libraries) is insufficient, this service is not well used. No medical library in Turkey has an interlibrary loan librarian. One of the major impediments to providing interlibrary loan service is the lack of serials holdings lists: some libraries do not have current lists of their own journal holdings, there are few union lists available, and there is no national union list of medical serials. Even those libraries that produce and distribute journal holdings lists to other libraries do not handle many interlibrary loans. The largest medical library in Turkey, Hacettepe University Medical Library, reported only 208 interlibrary loan transactions in 1985. Of the twenty-two libraries responding to the survey by Kalelioglu and Brennen, seven reported no interlibrary loan transactions for 1985 and seven left that question blank [12]. The larger libraries do borrow from the British Lending Library, from the U.S. National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, Maryland, and from the Medical College of Wisconsin Libraries in Milwaukee.

Local sharing of library resources is just beginning in Turkey. For example, in Istanbul, Turkey’s largest city (population: seven million), the local union list of medical serials has not been updated since 1981. As a result, these libraries often bypass local resources and go directly to YOK Library in Ankara or to British or American libraries. Within the last three years YOK Library, which was created by the Council of Higher Education, began serving as a resource library for all universities in Turkey. YOK Library has produced a list of approximately 12,000 serial titles. Since this list was distributed to all academic libraries in Turkey, they have begun to take advantage of this relatively new interlibrary loan service. However, there are still problems. First, although the collection is large, even by American standards, some requests cannot be filled. Second, and more important, YOK Library has a very small staff and only one photocopy machine, which creates a constant backlog and makes turnaround time for interlibrary loan requests two to three months. For professionals involved in direct patient care, this time lag is clearly unacceptable. The director of the YOK Library, aware of the slow service, has repeatedly requested additional copying equipment and staff, but has yet to receive a positive response from higher authority [13].

**Reference Services**

Because online database searching is not available in Turkish medical libraries, online SDI service has not been introduced. In some libraries, tables of contents of newly received journals are scanned on a regular basis and sent to the appropriate departments within the medical center. At Istanbul University-Capa Medical Center, the librarians send photocopies of requested articles in addition to the table of contents.
Clinical medical librarianship as it is practiced in the United States is generally unknown in Turkey. The authors, in talking to several Turkish physicians, found a certain reluctance on their part to accept this type of service. It was viewed as an encroachment on their professional territory. As in the United States, medical librarians in Turkey have to be assertive in educating Turkish health care professionals about the benefits of clinical librarianship.

Ready reference service is provided in Turkey, but there is generally not a high demand for it. The reference collections are limited in size and often quite out-of-date. Only at Hacettepe University in Ankara and Marmara University in Istanbul, where classroom instruction is in English, did librarians appear to be actively involved in providing ready reference service—because there was an ongoing demand for it.

**Circulation/Reserve Services**

As in American medical libraries, in Turkey books circulate but journals do not. A variety of circulation systems are used in Turkey, most of them similar to U.S. systems. In one library, each patron’s photograph is affixed to a 5”x8” file card with the usual patron information. Each time that a patron checks out an item, the card is pulled and the item is recorded on the card. The large medical libraries have small reserve collections based primarily on faculty requests. Kalelioğlu and Brennen observed that circulation was generally quite low among the medical school libraries. The exception was Atatürk University Medical School library, which reported that 65,000 items circulated in 1985 [14].

**Photocopy Services**

Photocopying is available in all medical libraries in Turkey, but not on a coin or credit-card basis. Libraries usually have one or two photocopy machines; a staff member fills all copy requests. Because journals do not circulate and self-service photocopy machines do not exist, there is often a large backlog of photocopying to be done, especially in the large medical centers.

**Technical Services**

Lack of computer technology has the greatest effect in the technical services areas of Turkish medical libraries. There are often large backlogs of books to be cataloged and processed. The equipment (typewriters, stencil machines, photocopiers, etc.) is old and outdated. Catalog cards are often individually typed, and cards of different physical dimensions were seen in the card catalog of some libraries. Larger libraries produced cards by photocopying or by using an older model electronic typewriter. In some instances, stencil machines were used. Wherever possible the libraries use CIP for their cataloging authority. Most Turkish librarians were well aware of OCLC and expressed the wish that these services were available in Turkey [15].

**Statistics**

Generally speaking, Turkish medical librarians do not collect, record, or report library statistics on a regular basis. Relatively few records are collected for interlibrary loans, circulation, patron count, reference statistics, or collection development statistics. This can create difficulties when library administrators attempt to justify funding requests for additional staff, collection development, equipment and other library operational expenses [16].

**Future Prospects**

Despite the multitude of problems in providing adequate medical library services to health care professionals in Turkey, there is nevertheless a detectable sense of determination among librarians, clinicians, and researchers in the biomedical sciences that enhanced resources and services be made available. The future can bring continuing dividends in human and social values if the Turkish library community is given the opportunity to match its aspirations with the means for their realization. A moral and financial commitment on the part of the Council of Higher Education and university administrators will be necessary for such aspirations to be met. The necessity of reform has still to be demonstrated and understood by these authorities, so this may not be an easy task.

However, administrators in at least some of the major medical centers in Turkey are beginning to recognize that the plight of medical libraries is a serious barrier to the development of centers of health care excellence. These indicators include the construction in recent years of new medical school libraries at Istanbul University both at the Çapa and Cerrahpaşa campuses, and the construction of a new clinical library at Marmara University Medical School in 1985–1986, followed by a new central medical library at the same institution in 1986–1987. In addition, over the past several years a number of librarians have been sent to West
Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and the United States for advanced library degrees and onsite work-training programs. The recent purchase of a microcomputer by Hacettepe University Medical Library clearly establishes a model for other medical school libraries to follow and illustrates the fundamental role that computers play in information transfer. All of these are positive indicators for a bright and promising future for Turkish medical libraries.

There remain stumbling blocks: financial problems, lack of professional incentives, low librarian salaries, over-control by the Council of Higher Education, and the technology lag. How these factors will be overcome will be watched with interest by the international library community.

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