

TURKEY'S EMERGENCY MEDICINE JOURNEY

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The late 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century have seen a significant change in delivery of health services as a result of advances in medical science and technology, as well as growing global population and urbanization. To meet patients' demands in this environment, and especially to create solutions in emergency health problems, healthcare professionals aimed to improve the quality of care in pre-hospital and hospital emergency departments, and therefore improve public health indicators by reducing death and disability. Emergency medicine deals with the entire human organism, and therefore differs from most other medical specialties, which have an anatomical definition.

Emergency medicine is a scientific branch that aims to provide rapid decision-making and prompt treatment for certain health disorders in order to prevent death and disability. Emergency care of the patients is a continuous and dynamic process, based on the needs of the patients both in the pre-hospital and emergency department environments. Emergency care is therefore considered as a separate discipline, administered by a special group of providers who commit all their energy and knowledge in this field. Doctors within this specialty, who are trained in acute medical and traumatic conditions, work for continuous evaluation, stabilization, treatment and referral of the patients.

Despite its relatively short history, emergency medicine residency training in Turkey expanded rapidly in order to meet the demand for such services. The very first step in the development of emergency medicine residency programs started with the efforts of emergency physician John Fowler, who was from the USA, where emergency medicine was born, following his invitation to join the Dokuz Eylul University Hospital Emergency Department (Izmir, Turkey) in 1990.

Dr. Fowler's hard work proved fruitful in 1993, when several firsts were seen: Emergency medicine was accepted as a specialty and two departments of emergency medicine were established, one at Dokuz Eylul University in Izmir and the other one at Firat University, in Elazig. The two-year Ambulance and Emergency Care Technician (paramedic) degree program also started accepting students during the same year. The emergency medicine residents who started their training in 1994 became the first emergency physicians in the country in 1998. This led the introduction of true emergency physicians to hospitals run by the Ministry of Health where, until then, general practitioners and allied health professionals provided a form of emergency care that was more like a triage-at-the door concept. On the other hand, academic emergency medicine staff started making differences by their presence in their institutions... Things were changing... Those who initially opposed the change started to feel the difference and asked to become part of it by working at the emergency departments. Shortly after the acquisition of the academic title "Associate Professor" for the first time by an emergency physician in 2002, almost all of the university teaching hospitals across Turkey started offering emergency medicine residency training and academic emergency physicians started to replace the academic staff from other specialties during the establishment of those new departments. Realizing the impact made by emergency physicians, the Ministry of Health decided to offer emergency medicine residency programs through their own Training and Research Hospitals, in 2006.

Today, the number of emergency physicians has reached 400, as increasing numbers of physicians commit to working tirelessly, day and night, in this most difficult field of medicine. About one third of all emergency physicians work as academic staff at university hospitals. With 80 million emergency department visits annually nationwide, this ever-growing specialty clearly has significant potential to grow even further.

The Association of Turkish Emergency Physicians (EPAT) was established in 1999 as part of this dynamic process. As a specialty organization, EPAT aims to support the development of emergency medicine in Turkey, assist with the development of higher quality emergency medicine residency training programs, improve the working conditions of emergency physicians, and protect their rights. During the 12 years of its presence, the EPAT has overcome many difficulties and obstacles and became a decision-maker and agenda setter power. If people asking “why is emergency medicine necessary?” in the past now say, “emergency medicine is a must”, the EPAT should be seen as the driving force and supporter of this transition. Having organized seven national congresses, 12 symposia, and many courses and other scientific activities and gaining enormous amount of experience and never ending desire for hard work, the EPAT is proud to host the European Emergency Medicine Congress with the European Society for Emergency Medicine (EuSEM).

With best wishes,



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