

THE HISTORY OF TURKEY'S "NATIONAL PHARMACY DAY"

Halil Tekiner, MSc Pharm, BSc, haliltekiner@gmail.com

Community Pharmacist in Kayseri, Turkey, and Member of the British Society for the History of Pharmacy



A snapshot from the previous celebration of May 14 in Izmir, Turkey (Courtesy, Izmir Chamber of Pharmacists)

Since 1968, Turkey has been observing National Pharmacy Day on May 14. On this day each year, vibrant celebrations are held nationwide and include a variety of educational events (such as conferences, panels, meetings, pharmacy awareness campaigns, and other health-promotion activities) and social activities (concerts, galas, dinners, etc.). On this day, pharmacists also enjoy the unique opportunity to appear in the media and to convey their ideas to a vast audience. Given the importance of this day, the Turkish Pharmacists' Association (TPA),

its regional chambers, and all Faculties of Pharmacy begin planning the organization of their events at least a month in advance.

Indeed, for nearly every Turkish pharmacist, May 14 is much like the traditional "New Year's Day"; it is a time to reflect upon the past year and to gather new hope and energy for the times to come. Despite the popularity of National Pharmacy Day, many pharmacists are still unaware of the significance of May 14.

Initial Discussions about a National Pharmacy Day in Turkey

Turkish pharmacists first began discussing a national day to celebrate their profession in 1949, when pharmacist Remzi Kocaer (1904–1977) published an article making that very suggestion (1,2). This idea continued to be discussed in several academic publications in the 1950s. Finally, in 1958, the Third Great Congress of the TPA decided to appoint a "Pharmacy Day commission." This commission—composed of pharmacy historians, academicians, and pharmacists—was asked to find the most appropriate date.

In a 1960 report, commission member Prof. Dr. Turhan Baytop (1920–2002), suggested **November 5** as a symbolic date since this was the graduation day (in 1840) of Ahmet Mustafa Efendi, the first Ottoman



A photo taken at the first celebration of the National Pharmacy Day on May 14, 1968, in Istanbul, Turkey (Courtesy, Prof. Dr. Afife Mat)

Era pharmacist (3). This date also coincided with the biannual congresses of the TPA, meaning that both occasions could be celebrated around the same time. However, other priorities overrode Baytop's suggestion and November 5 was not fixed as the date for National Pharmacy Day (3,4).

In 1968, a decade after the Pharmacy Day commission first convened, Azmi Kerman (1947–), a pharmacy student from Istanbul University Faculty of Pharmacy, made extensive efforts to appoint a National Pharmacy Day. Kerman, who was also president of the student union at that time, sought support from many people, including the dean of his Faculty and the TPA president. Unlike Baytop before him, Kerman succeeded in his endeavor. The first official National Pharmacy Day celebration took place on May 14, 1968, with participation from Istanbul governor Vefa Poyraz, health officials, pharmacists, academicians, and students (4,5). Yet why did they choose that particular date?

The Importance of May 14 in Turkey's Pharmacy History

The selection of May 14 dates back to the reign of Mahmud II (1785–1839). This Ottoman Sultan, well known for his extensive legal and military reforms, laid the groundwork for the *Tanzîmât* (Reorganization). The *Tanzîmât*, proclaimed on November 3, 1839, (not long after the Sultan's death on July 1) had a direct impact on Turkish law and society. This era of "reorganization" ushered in European style education, clothing, architecture, legislation, finance, and institutional organization. Among these "Western" reforms was the establishment of the *Mekteb-i Tibbiye-i Adliye-i Sahane* (Imperial School of Medicine) in Istanbul in 1827, a milestone in the Empire's medical history.



Peculiar's Portrait of Sultan Mahmud II (1785–1839), founder of the first Pharmacy Class in the Ottoman Empire in 1839

The Imperial School's first pharmacy class was conducted on May 14, 1839, in the presence of Sultan Mahmud II himself and by Dr. Charles Ambroise Bernard (1808–1844) from Austria, who had been invited as a

basmuallim (head teacher). During the ensuing years, Turkish faculty members were joined by graduates of the Faculty of Pharmacy in Paris, including Antoine Calleja (1806–1893), Charles Bonkowski (1841–1905), and Giorgio Della Sudda (1835–1913). Initially the program lasted two years; soon, however, it was expanded to three years. Additionally, the courses were taught in French until 1870, owing to the lack of Turkish medical resources during that period (3).

Toward an International Pharmacy Day

From my experiences as a Turkish pharmacist, I believe that a National Pharmacy Day offers its own unique rewards; this occasion allows us to come together to discuss our common problems and to brainstorm for solutions. We can exchange ideas and experiences, thus contributing to strengthening our professional identities and the solidarity among us. Moreover, it is an intelligent PR move to present pharmacists as a "united group of health professionals," thereby improving our image in the eyes of our target group—patients and their families.

Writing about Turkey's Pharmacy Day made me curious about whether other countries commemorated such a day. I conducted extensive research on this and was slightly disappointed to find that not much was being done elsewhere. Although some nations host pharmacy-related days, weeks, and even a month under different names, these events focus on patients, pharmacy students, or those who seek a career in pharmaceutical industry; none of these events focused on the

pharmacist him/herself. As per my understanding, these events are not in line with our own concept of National Pharmacy Day apart from Turkey. Few countries (including the United States, Canada, and the Czech Republic) hold a true National Pharmacy Day.

I continued my search for an International Pharmacy Day until I was informed by the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) that such a concept did not exist. We hold international celebrations of other professions, e.g., World Teachers' Day (October 5), International Nurses' Day (May 12), and Secretaries' Week (March 21 to 26). It is a pity that we do not have one



A photo from FIP's constituent meeting held on September 25, 1912, in The Hague (Courtesy of FIP)

common day for pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists during which we can celebrate our profession together throughout the world. Therefore, here, I humbly suggest that we come together to celebrate an International Pharmacy Day on **September 25**. This day in 1912 witnessed the official formation of the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) in The Hague (6). It is my sincere wish that this humble proposal be considered by the relevant authorities before the Federation's centennial in 2012.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Afife Mat from Istanbul University; Mr. Hilmi Sener, Vice President of the Turkish Pharmacists' Association (TPA); to Mr. Tuncay Sayilkan, President of the Chamber of Pharmacists in Izmir; to Mrs. Donsel Cosar from the Library of TPA; and to my dear friends, Ms. Myriah Lesko and Mr. Luc Besançon from the FIP Bureau in The Hague, and Ms. Aja Petrikova from the Czech Republic for their precious collaborations in obtaining the necessary information, documents, and photos for this article.

References

1. Kocaer, Remzi. "Turkiye Eczaciliginin Gunu," *Farmakolog cilt 19 sayi 5* (1949): 173-175.
2. Baytop, Turhan. "Turk Eczacilik Gunu," *1959 Eczaci Yilligi*. Istanbul, 1959.
3. Baytop, Turhan. *Turk Eczacilik Tarihi*. Kisaltilmis Ikinci Baskiya Hazirlayan: Prof. Dr. Afife Mat, Istanbul Universitesi Yayinlari n. 3358, Istanbul: Santay Matbaasi, 2001: 319-320.
4. Mat, Afife. "Turk Eczacilik Gunu," *Bir Kurumun Oyusu – Turk Eczacilari Birligi 1956-2006*. Turk Eczacilari Birligi Yayinlari, Ankara: Fersa Matbaacilik, 2007: 345-356.
5. Kerman, Azmi. "14 Mayıs Eczacilik Gunu 1968 Yilindan Bu Yana Kutlanmaktadır," *Posyon cilt 7 sayi 2* (1998): 37-38.
6. Koning, Wittoop D. A. "50th Anniversary of FIP, 1912-1962," *Journal mondial de Pharmacie* n. 5 (1962): 181-219.