



04.10.2012

Dear Colleagues,

As you know, the IMF and World Bank-approved Health Transformation Program, a product of the neoliberal political approach implemented in Turkey since 2003, is proceeding apace in the hands of the AKP government under slogans of privatization, competition, customer satisfaction, decentralization, performance-based compensation, and efficiency in expenses.

For the past couple of years, the government has been issuing legislation and decrees with the force of law so as to keep its promise to the World Bank to complete the Health Transformation Program in 2013 and remove all obstacles to the Program as fast as possible.

Over the course of the past nine years,

- the healthcare responsibilities of the state have been diminished and handed over to the markets, whose primary motive is profits,
- privatization and monopolization have accelerated,
- the share of private hospitals in healthcare provision has gone from 8% to above 50%,
- quality of healthcare is diminishing while healthcare spending has increased six fold,
- patients have all but turned into customers, and hospitals into shopping centers,
- patient rights have been reduced to common consumer rights and satisfaction,
- a large part of the healthcare workforce, and a majority of those in the private sector,
- have no work or wage security, and are condemned to work for low wages,
- being a doctor has lost its respectability as a profession, the work of physicians has been devalued,
- problems in the healthcare system have been blamed on physicians, making enemies of patients and doctors,
- violence against healthcare workers has become an epidemic in society, with one colleague losing his life as a result of these attacks which have become all too common,
- the number and quota of medicine faculties have been increased, decreasing the quality of medical training,
- meanwhile the Turkish people are being forced to pay higher insurance premiums and contributions including for primary healthcare.

Government Decree No. 663 issued in November 2011 has removed the phrasing from the first article of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB) Law that "the purpose of the profession of a physician is to serve the public and the person" thus aiming to remove the legal basis of the TTB and render it ineffectual, and has transferred the tasks and authorities of professional organizations that do not support government policies to a "Health Professions Board" largely defined by the government, posing a serious threat to the independence of the medical profession and physicians' self-governance.

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In an amendment to the Fundamental Law on the Health Services, the "public-private partnership" has opened the way for suitable state hospitals to be privatized, for unsuitable ones to be eliminated, and for public funds to be redirected to companies running health campuses that are yet to be established.

In August 2012 another Law no. 6354 was promulgated with provisions imposing heavy work schedules on family doctors, removing work security in mandatory services, restricting cesareans, transferring the administration of university hospitals to the Ministry of Health in the name of cooperation, and making teaching staff work on a contract basis. A provision seeking to largely outlaw abortions, ignoring the rights of women over their own bodies, is still waiting to be passed by parliament.

In May and June 2012, 13 medical faculty students and 68 members and administrators of the Confederation of Public Workers' Unions (KESK) were arrested and imprisoned during their opposition to the Health Transformation Program.

The stance of supporting the opposition to the present government in the civil war in Syria has also had a negative impact on us; the voices of chambers of medicine as well as all institutions calling for peace are being silenced, as medical workers in the border region are being forced to treat injured militants.

We believe that we will see FEMS standing with us more in the coming period in our struggle against all these impositions on the physicians of Turkey, and offer our respects and best wishes to the Board.

ISTANBUL CHAMBER OF MEDICINE