

March 14 Medicine Day

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Throughout history, people have assigned special meanings to some days of the year and commemorated that day or days every year in line with their ascribed meaning. Some of these are universal, such as the first day of the New Year or the beginning of spring. Those for commercial purposes, such as Mother's, Father's, and Valentine's Days, have also spread to large audiences. However, the most common are the special days of the faiths. There are also special days celebrated on different dates in different societies, which are similar in meaning and content, on which that group of people have achieved success, profit and superiority.

A few special days are specific to professions, such as Medicine Day. Most of them are ignored even among colleagues within that profession. Because of the strong influence of the medical profession on society, Medicine Day is celebrated in many countries on different days (July 1 in India, August 23 in Iran, December 3 in Cuba, etc.). Special days that drift on the flowing river of time have changed, except those which belong to the world of faith. For example, while Turkish society initially experienced November 10 (the passing away day of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk) as a day of great pain and mourning, it now commemorates it as a day of gratitude, respect and hope for a bright future.

Medical education in the Ottoman Empire began for the first time on March 14, 1827, during the reign of Sultan II. Mahmud. March 14 is also the name of the resistance against foreign occupation forces in 1919, during an unfortunate period when the Ottoman Empire was in its last days and the homeland was occupied. This day is considered a special day for those working in the medical field. The starting point of March 14, Medicine Day, is attributed to the Medical School student Hikmet Boran. However, just ten years ago, the number of people who knew the name of Hikmet Boran among medical students was very small. What is the history of this name? Why has the name Hikmet Boran come to the fore today? While examining the concept of March 14, perhaps we can reach the real definition of March 14 and understand whether it is a feast.

During the reign of reformist Sultan II. Mahmut (1808 – 1839), the structure of the army and the military education began to be reorganized. The opportunity to learn foreign languages arose in military schools, and while the eastern languages such as Arabic and Persian declined, French and German came to the fore. When military school students began to read magazines and publications in foreign languages, they started to develop the concept of social class,



followed by their search for national identity. The discussions on freedom, independence and democratic government that began in military schools shook the monarchy order and brought constitutional government to the country's agenda. In this context, the military Medical School, which had its share on reform movements and was called "Mektep-i Tibbiye-i Şahane-i Hümayun" since 1839, played a leading role. In 1867, a civilian Medical School, "Mektep-i Tibbiye-i Mülkiye", was established in a room of the military Medical School, and 1908, military and civilian Medical Schools were combined under the name "Darulfünun Faculty of Medicine".

Military Medical School students would live barracks life and receive medical education with the order and discipline of a boarding school. The students' uniforms were elegant and worthy of a Sultan. Friday was a holiday. Students would leave school wearing clothes equipped with gold cords, epaulettes, silver rapiers, patent leather boots and silver spurs. When the Sultans went to the Friday greetings, the people gathered there traditionally shouted, "Don't be arrogant, my Sultan; there is a God greater than you!" Upon exit, all university students lined up according to their faculty. Similarly, as the royal carriage was passing in front of them, they shouted, "Long live my Sultan" upon the signal given. Every new Medical School student had been informed by an older one in the upper class on the first Friday morning that the "Medical School students do not shout at the Friday greetings". This action, carried out with the discourse of a superior, is important in understanding the differences of military students. After the daily education, in the evening meetings, an expert assistant or sometimes a successful senior elder brother, called a "repetitor (re-teller)," would briefly re-explain the lessons taught that day to the cadets and clarifies unclear issues. Repetitors would also convey information about the country's situation and military, political and economic problems to military students who was lack communication opportunities those days. Students were encouraged to ask questions, propose and discuss their own solutions. With this ideological background, some Medical School students participated in the Balkan wars (October 8, 1912 - August 10, 1913) as bouncers. The İttihat ve Terakki Fırkası, which came to power under Ottoman rule, established Teşkilatı Mahsusa units, which would operate secretly under state control. Medical School students interrupted their education and volunteered in this organization, and some were dispersed to regular army units. The Medical School did not have any graduates in 1915. In 1917, only 17 students graduated from the school as Medical

Captains.

It is understandable that the students of an institution whose culture is engraved with the ideals and love of homeland and nation, independence and freedom, join the lines of fire as volunteers when the homeland is in danger. These students discussed the issue of identity and chose their sides at a very young age. The ideas of autonomy, freedom and independence of military Medical School students have been transmitted, inherited and protected as a genetic code for years.

The British partially occupied Istanbul on 13 November 1918 and fully occupied on 16 March 1920. The Medical School in Haydarpaşa is a majestic building overlooking the Marmara Sea. When the occupying forces wanted to evacuate the building and use it for their purposes, they encountered unexpected resistance from the medical faculty, experts, assistants and students. The resistance bore fruit, with the intervention of the Ottoman administrators, a border separation was created in the school with a wooden curtain, and British forces settled on one side of the school. On the other side, students resisted, sometimes enduring harsh conditions, but decidedly did not leave the building.

The Medical School supported the Anatolian movement, which started in May 1919, with all its might and stood behind Mustafa Kemal Pasha. Ahmet Nuri (Bursa), a senior student (congress member), and Hikmet (Boran), a third-year student, were selected to attend the Sivas congress held in September. Ahmet Nuri (Bursa), who spoke before the vote in an environment where the idea of a mandate was dominant, changed the atmosphere of the Congress with his high oratory power and faithful nationalist words. When the session was recessed, opponents of the mandate, including Mustafa Kemal, met together, and Hikmet spoke. In line with the education he received and the awareness he gained, Hikmet uttered those words by saying, "On behalf of the Medical Schools that I represent". That young man says, "We cannot accept the mandate regime. Either Independence or Death". Hikmet, an enterprising student, became the symbol of resistance as he hung the Turkish Flag on the school's towers among all the Medical School students who resisted the British forces trying to occupy the school on March 14, 1919. After this resistance and action, the date of March 14 came to the country's agenda once again with the spirit and mentality represented by the Medical School. Medical students are the pioneers of the rebellion of the people accustomed to freedom. Therefore, we

must remember our debt of gratitude to them. We have Medical School elders who have created a Medical School tradition that integrates with March 14, who prioritize the homeland above all else, who do not evade responsibility even in the most challenging conditions, who are sent to duty for the homeland both themselves and their children just like Ahmets and Hikmets, and stand behind them like the mountains.

We wish “gratitude and respect to our teachers” in the medical oath. It is very appropriate. We, and those who will join the profession afterwards, should remember our teachers who have grown Hüseyin Hulkis, Ahmet Nuris, and Hikmet Borans, who created the concept of March 14 with all their sacrifices, even with their lives. We should remember our martyrs with God’s mercy and grace.

Is March 14 a feast?

Dear colleagues, March 14 has changed depending on the year. Sometimes, it was a feast, balls were held, and sports festivals were celebrated. Sometimes, there was disappointment and pain. Halls were raided asking, “Can we celebrate March 14 under these conditions?” and sometimes, anthems were sung, and oaths of freedom and independence were sworn. However, each passing year, March 14 as a concept has risen and become a monument. March 14 is the epic of the efforts and sacrifices Medical School students gave to our country at the expense of their lives on the path to freedom and independence. It is sacred. It should be celebrated in any way, according to the conditions of the time and in line with the concept it contains.

Sincerely yours,

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