



Portraits from Our Medical History Dr. Behçet Uz (1893-1986)

Tıp Tarihimizden Portreler: Dr. Behçet Uz (1893-1986)

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The young generations that shaped the country in the last period of the Ottoman Empire played important roles in the early Republican period, not only in the establishment and foundation of the new regime, but also in the restructuring of the country. The new Turkish state supported the young people who would lead this process and tried to pave the way for them as much as possible. Physicians such as Dr. Refik Saydam, Dr. Adnan Adıvar, and Dr. Behçet Uz who left their mark on the history of Turkish medicine in the recent period, came to the fore in this context and benefited the society with their political and professional activities during the painful periods of the transition from empire to national state.

Family, Childhood and Education

Dr. Behçet Uz one of the physicians we mentioned, was born in Buldan on January 16, 1893 (Figure 1). His father, who played a very important role in his life, was Mr. Mufti Salih and his mother was Mrs. Ayşe. His childhood years were spent in his hometown, and he completed his primary and secondary education in Buldan. The period between 1905 and 1910, when he studied at İzmir İdadisi as a free-boarding student, directly influenced his personal development.

In this process, he witnessed the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy on July 23, 1908, welcomed with interest the reinstatement of the first Ottoman constitution, the Kanun-u Esasi, on July 23, 1908, after 30 years of suspension,



Figure 1. Dr. Behçet Uz.¹

and sympathized with the Committee of Union and Progress, which led the new era. In this period, he adopted the slogan "Liberty, Justice, Equality, Brotherhood" of the society, which was a continuation of the Young-Turk movement, and attended the classes of Şükrü (Saraçoğlu), Fuat Ziya (Yamanlar), Hüseyin Ragıp and Yusuf Rıza, who were known to be close to the society.

After graduating from high school, Dr. Behçet Uz preferred to continue his education at the Mekteb-i Tıbbiye-i Adliye-i Şahane, where names close to the society such as Mazhar Pasha, Besim Ömer (Akalin) Pasha, Kadri Reşit (Anday) Pasha, Akil Muhtar (Özden), Celal Muhtar (Özden) and Adnan (Adıvar) worked (1-5).

¹ The original photograph is in the Archive of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (1).

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Dr. Behçet Uz, played an active role within the Turkish Hearths, one of the most important platforms of the nationalist line during this period. In 1911, he was elected as the president of the Medical Faculty Students' Association, which conducted a comprehensive health survey throughout Anatolia. His father, who had a great share in helping him reach this stage and supported his education by showing a serious example of sacrifice, died in 1914 when he was a second-year student at the faculty of medicine (2-4).

Professional Life and the Period in İzmir

Dr. Behçet Uz, graduated from the faculty of medicine on November 18, 1918, after a period of absence due to the Balkan War. In 1919, he started his academic life as an assistant professor at the Pediatrics Clinic of the Faculty of Medicine,² under Professor Kadri Reşit Pasha. As a young physician, he also worked at Şişli Etfal Hospital during this period when he gained experience rapidly (1-3). Meanwhile, World War I had ended, the Armistice of Mudros was signed on October 30, 1918, and the Entente Powers, citing the controversial seventh article of the armistice, began to occupy Anatolia. On May 15, 1919, İzmir was occupied by British-backed Greek troops and the National Struggle led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha began. Dr. Behçet Uz, married Mrs. Sıdıka, the daughter of Mr. Hafız Ethem from the Buldanlıoğlu family, through the help of Kadri Reşit Pasha, in 1920, when he was working intensively at Şişli Etfal Hospital and the Faculty of Medicine. Although he lived in İstanbul for a while after the wedding, he later settled in occupied İzmir at the insistence of his wife (1,4).

Dr. Behçet Uz, who started working as the director of the pediatrics service at the Memleket Hospital, where he was appointed soon after, became an admired name for his social activities as well as his medical practice (2,5). In this context, while working as a physician at the French Hospital, the Child Protection Agency and the Aydın Şimendifer Company, he took care of patients at the pharmacy opened by Mr. Lütfi for patients whose income level was not satisfactory without any financial interest. On the other hand, he constantly renewed himself in his profession of medicine, in which he excelled, and became a popular figure due to the importance he attached to public health.

Shortly before the proclamation of the Republic, Dr. Behçet Uz, acting with the awareness of the responsibility his profession imposed on him, founded the İzmir Tuberculosis Combat Society Hayriyesi on February 18, 1923, together with twelve of his colleagues. The society filled the gap left by the Ottoman Tuberculosis Combat Society, which had been established in İstanbul in 1918 but became inactive due to

the occupation on March 16, 1920. The main objective of the society was to develop a vaccine against the rapidly spreading tuberculosis disease. Officially completing its establishment process on April 14, 1923, the society played a significant role in shaping the health policies of the young Turkish Republic. Dr. Behçet Uz, who had lost his first daughter, Mübeşşir, to tuberculosis at the age of twelve, approached the issue with great sensitivity and would serve for many years as the General Secretary and President of the society. During this period, as the President of the İzmir Medical Association, Dr. Uz also drew attention to the public health infrastructure issues in the city and took a personal interest in the health of Zübeyde Hanım, Atatürk's mother, who was residing in İzmir (3,5,7,8).

In 1930, Dr. Behçet Uz became a member of the municipal council and attracted attention with his sensitive attitude towards the problems of the city (4). As the mayor of İzmir between 1931 and 1941, he initiated large-scale projects to eliminate the city's infrastructure deficiencies. He established children's gardens, parks and bazaars in every district and laid the foundations of healthy urbanization by opening wide avenues and boulevards. On July 28, 1932, he inaugurated the Atatürk monument, which he had commissioned from Italian sculptor Pietro Cononica, with his own hand (1,4,9). He laid the foundation of the children's hospital he established with the donations he collected on April 23, 1938 (4,10-12). The hospital was inaugurated by Prime Minister Recep Peker on April 2, 1947, during his term as Minister of Health. The bed capacity of the hospital, which was 150 when it was founded, increased to 520 after a while (Figure 2) (10,11).

It is possible to see the traces of Dr. Behçet Uz in the establishment process of İzmir International Fair, one of the largest fairs in Türkiye. The fair was opened on September 1, 1936 in the area that was previously used as Kültürpark and provided a serious added value for the Turkish economy for many years (2,3,5,9,13).

Dr. Behçet Uz successful management was made possible by his on-site identification of problems and his solution-oriented actions by bypassing bureaucratic mechanisms (1,14). Thanks to his high performance, he was highly appreciated by Atatürk (15). However, he had difficulties especially in financing and had great difficulty in preparing the budget. His uncompromising implementation of austerity measures and restrictions on municipal investments, when necessary, had a positive impact on the current account deficit. With his tight monetary policy, he managed to pay off a significant portion of the debts he inherited from the past (16). His performance as a physician is remarkable.

² When the pediatrics clinic in the faculty of medicine, which was opened in Haydarpaşa in 1909 with the merger of the military (Mekteb-i Tıbbiye-i Adliye-i Şahane) and civilian (Mekteb-i Tıbbiye-i Mülkiye) faculties of medicine, was put into service in 1917, Kadri Reşit Pasha was appointed as an associate professor of pediatrics and became a professor a year later (6).



Figure 2. Dr. Behçet Uz with Prime Minister Recep Peker at the opening of the hospital named after him (2 April 1947) (3).

Political Life, Ministry of Health Periods and National Health Plan

Dr. Behçet Uz, served his country as an MP for Denizli in the sixth, seventh and eighth legislative periods and as an MP for İzmir in the 10th and 11th legislative periods. During the Sixth Legislative Period, he served as the Minister of Trade in the first Şükrü Saraçoğlu government (4). Between July 9, 1942 and March 9, 1943, during his first ministerial term, he ensured that the National Protection Law was implemented in a sound manner, established the supply-demand balance on a stable basis and tried to strengthen the legal infrastructure on which commercial life was based (1,4,8,14,17). The Law on National Protection is a legal regulation adopted in January 1940, during the first phase of World War II, authorizing the government to set prices, confiscate products and impose compulsory labor obligations in times of emergency. In general, it bears the traces of the statist economic model.

Dr. Behçet Uz, who was re-elected as an MP in 1946 due to his performance, served as the Minister of Health and Social Welfare between August 7, 1946 and June 10, 1948 during the Recep Peker and Hasan Saka governments (2-4).

In this period of time, when he assumed responsibility as the Minister of Health for the first time, Dr. Behçet Uz worked intensively to act within a specific plan as soon as he took office, and turned his attention to preparing the 10-Year National Health Plan, which he had conceived in his mind in order to provide health services in a fast and high-quality manner (1,18,19). In one of his letters on the subject, he makes the following assessment:

“The first thing we did after my appointment as Minister of Health and Social Welfare was to work day and night for six months to prepare a health plan. The aim and objective was to

ensure that everyone, poor or rich, urban or rural, had the best possible access to national health services...”³

The plan focused on solutions to current problems such as health centers, preventive medicine and the fight against infectious diseases, and proposed a “National Health Bank” and “health funds” in response to the financing problem that had left previous plans and projects inconclusive. The plan, which became a draft law in about a year and a half, was passed by the commission during the reign of Prime Minister Hasan Saka but could not be enacted due to a change in the government, and Dr. Behçet Uz resigned from the ministry without waiting for the process to conclude (2-4).

The draft law essentially emphasizes the following points:

1. Management and administration of all hospitals by the Ministry of Health,
2. Rehabilitation of hospitals and elimination of infrastructure deficiencies, commissioning new hospitals according to need,
3. Paying for health services, covering the costs of low-income patients by the private administration,
4. Introduction of voluntary insurance, free access to all kinds of health services for those with social security,
5. Personal rights of health personnel such as wages and social security to be under the responsibility of the health bank to be established,
6. Establishing a full-fledged hospital in seven important locations and a medical faculty with the capacity to meet all requirements,
7. Ensuring that all citizens benefit from preventive and curative health services, dividing all districts into

³ Rahmi Dirican, “Dr. Behçet Uz (1893-1986) and the National Health Plan”, *Toplum ve Hekim*, Vol. 16, No. 6, p. 466 cited in Dr. Behçet Uz’s, letter to his friend Nihat Eğriboz dated August 12, 1970 (2).

groups of forty villages, providing an ambulance helicopter to each group and ambulance service to all villages (2,20-25).

The plan emphasized the following points about the responsibilities of the proposed health bank:

1. Personal rights of health personnel such as wages and social security to be under the responsibility of the health bank to be established,
2. Creating staff with high technical capacity to build modern hospitals,
3. Developing and managing hospitals according to current needs,
4. Introduction of health insurance,
5. Establishing farms in appropriate locations to meet the food needs of hospitals,
6. Supervised production and transportation of all medical supplies, establishment and operation of facilities producing special food for children,
7. Efficient use of healing waters (2,24,25).

During this period as Minister of Health, Dr. Behçet Uz did not only focus on this plan. In this context, he also made great efforts for the expansion of health institutions throughout the country (1). He paid special attention to the fight against infectious diseases. Under this heading, he increased the number of anti-tuberculosis societies to 50, ensured the widespread use of the BCG vaccine known as tuberculosis vaccine and convened the General Congress of the Tuberculosis Society (27,28). Malaria, one of the most common diseases of the period, was another health problem he emphasized (29,30). He showed the same sensitivity to the plague (31,32). The fight against cholera was at the top of his agenda (1,33). The High Health Council, which completed its work on February 24, 1947 under the leadership of Dr. Behçet Uz, was a platform where all these studies were discussed and future perspectives were expressed (34).

It should be noted that simultaneously with these and similar professional activities, Dr. Behçet Uz, chaired the İstanbul organization of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and served as an executive in the commission organizing the 1950 elections (35).

Dr. Behçet Uz, was excluded from the parliament in the May 14, 1950 elections and joined the Democratic Party (DP) in 1953 (4). In the 1954 elections, upon the request of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, he was elected as an independent İzmir MP from the DP list and re-entered the parliament (1-4).

We see Dr. Behçet Uz as the Minister of Health for the second time in the 3rd Adnan Menderes government between May 17, 1954 and December 9, 1955 (36). It was during this

period that he prepared the National Health Program, which was a continuation of the Ten-Year National Health Plan, and the plan titled Studies on the Health Bank. On December 8, 1954, he announced the new plan to the public, presenting a strong vision for the country's health infrastructure and asking for public support (4). The plan was organized around the following objectives:

- 1- Establishment of full-fledged health administrations in rural areas,
- 2- Solving equipment, personnel and infrastructure problems of provincial hospitals,
- 3- Establishment of health zones in regions with low population density,
- 4- Widespread implementation of preventive medicine service with modern methods in the fight against infectious diseases,
- 5- Making medicinal waters available to the public (19,37,38).

Dr. Behçet Uz thought that the plan emphasizing these important points could be realized within 10 years. To this end, he took immediate action and analyzed the latest health picture of the country in detail (1). As always, he attached special importance to the fight against infectious diseases (39). The draft laws prepared in this context envisaged the establishment of full-fledged provincial hospitals and qualified health centers for rural areas (19). As before, the National Health Bank and health insurance, which were planned to be established, were addressed for the financing aspect of the issue (19,37). However, despite his high performance, Dr. Behçet Uz resigned from the Ministry of Health again after the draft law on the National Health Program dragged on in the commission, stating that he was *"the victim of unthinkable, secret thoughts..."* (1-4). Prof. Dr. Rahmi Dirican, who is known for his studies on the subject, states that although he contacted Dr. Behçet Uz about this issue, which was waiting to be solved as a serious problematic, there was no satisfactory explanation about the phrase *"inconceivable, secret thoughts"* (2):

"In our opinion, the bill, which was prepared with great efforts, may have been inconclusive due to its need for a very high financial support. Statesmen and high-level bureaucrats with influence over the executive power may have taken a negative attitude for this reason".

As an idealistic physician and successful minister of health, Dr. Behçet Uz, in his second and last term as minister of health, was not contented with the plan he prepared, but tried to be effective in other areas as well. In this context, the *"Instructions for Hospitals"*, which he prepared by considering current needs, was approved by the Council of Ministers, and he established strong regulations on clinics and polyclinics (40,41). While Dr. Behçet Uz, focused on the legal infrastructure of the

issue with these and similar initiatives, he also displayed a remarkable operational approach. As a matter of fact, during his last ministry, there was a noticeable increase in the number of dispensaries across the country (1). In the face of the shortage of medicines and medical equipment, which had become a serious problem, both legal measures were taken, and the problem was partially solved with the implementation of medicine cabinets (42). Simultaneously with the aforementioned activities, Dr. Behçet Uz, performed well against trachoma, typhoid and venereal diseases, which came to the forefront among infectious diseases, and made a name for himself with the blood banks and forensic medicine councils he pioneered (43-46).

Dr. Behçet Uz, was elected as an MP for İzmir from the DP in the 1957 elections, his political life ended with the military coup of May 27, 1960, and he was arrested like other DP politicians and tried before the Court of Justice established in Yassıada (47). The defense he wrote during the trials, which lasted for about a year, is remarkable and is a brief summary of his life (48) (Figure 3). After serving nearly two and a half years of his four-and-a-half-year prison sentence in Kayseri Prison, he was granted amnesty and regained his freedom (1).

Dr. Behçet Uz, who did not take part in active politics in his later life, mostly engaged in education, health and social

responsibility projects, passed away on May 19, 1986 in İzmir. His grave is in Bornova Kokluluca Cemetery (1-3).

We remember with respect and gratitude Dr. Behçet Uz, who devoted his life to Turkish medicine, his patients and his country, and achieved significant successes as a physician, a minister of health and a mayor...

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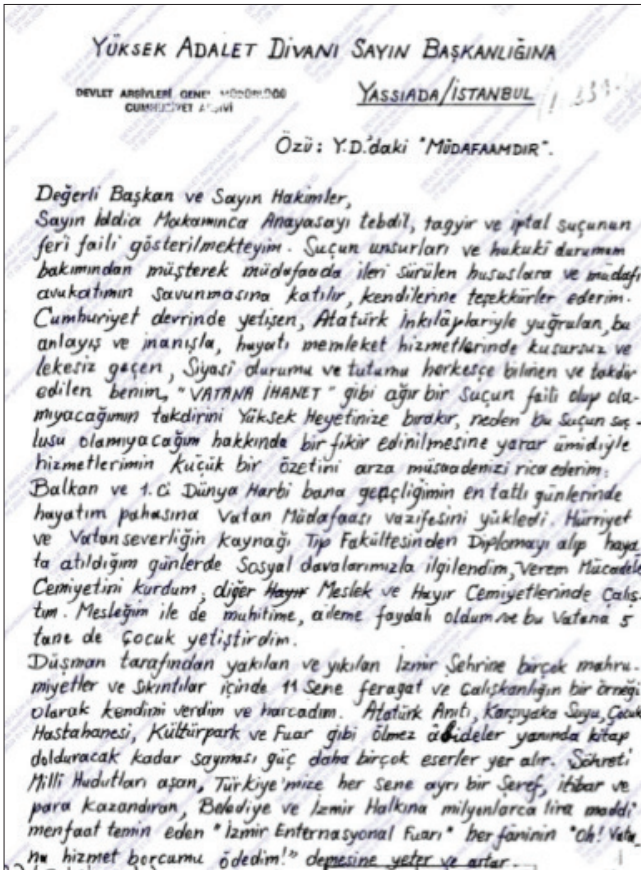


Figure 3. The first page of Dr. Behçet Uz's, defense on Yassıada (48).

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