Interview: Orhan Gazi Yigitbasi – Medical Director, Medipol Hospital – Turkey

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Medipol hospital's medical director discusses the private institution's current role in the Turkish healthcare system, and their plans for expansion in the coming years.

How did Medipol come into existence, and where does the hospital stand today?

Medipol was opened three years ago, and today the hospital has 500 beds, 133 of which are intensive care units: general, pediatric and cardiovascular surgery and cardiology. This is a huge ICU facility for Turkey. In total today, Medipol has 2,000 employees, including 350 medical doctors and almost 500 nurses. This is the largest hospital in the Turkish private sector, with 60 departments, including pediatrics, neurology, cardiology, and also an internal division that includes rheumatology and hematology departments.

Having this private alternative is important, especially because right now, the state medical universities are undergoing a crisis – we will continue to build our new system whatever happens with the state university. Medipol is the first combined private hospital and university in the country. We currently have 300 medical students in their third year and above doing their residencies in the hospital – and additionally, we have faculties for nursing, medical technicians, operations – many medical-related students are educated here each year.

Can you tell us about some of the innovative activities that Medipol is participating in?

We have a very good research lab here on the college campus, called REMER – the regenerative and restorative medical research center, a basic research institute focused on neurology and cancer research, which includes the technology to conduct molecular and genetic analysis for some specific diseases. We have between 30 or 40 scientists working there currently, and work on projects internally, and with private industry on a case-by-case basis.

You mentioned the crisis in the state university hospital. Overall, what is your assessment of the healthcare system in Turkey?

I can't give any objective answers because I work here in the private system, and because I'm not close to the state system I'm not informed enough to offer an opinion on it. But there is definitely a problem at the state university: in recent months and years, many doctors and scientists have left and transferred to the private sector.

What is Medipol's specialty in the relationship with the MOH, the SGK, and the public sector? What surgeries are being outsourced here?

First of all, pediatric cardiology, as there are few pediatric cardiologists in Turkey, and very few in state hospitals. And second, I would say transplant surgery, liver transplants especially, as well as pediatric and bone marrow transplants. There are also some complex neurosurgery procedures that we are relatively well equipped to handle.

Relative to other private hospital facilities in Turkey, what makes Medipol unique?

There are not many hospitals in the private sector in Turkey with so many medical doctors, beds and departments. This is our main differentiator. Also, we have a high level of technology. For example, the technology we have in our radiation oncology department is globally competitive: there is no other oncology department in Turkey that has the equipment and the expertise that we have at Medipol. We also have an experienced team of medical doctors. For example, in cardiothoracic surgery we have a very experienced team, as well as in neurosurgery, orthopedics, medical oncology, radiation oncology and surgical oncology.

In terms of the clients that come and use your facility, what is the breakdown between local private customers, customers coming from public sector, and medical tourists?

We currently have 3,000 outpatients per day. In the private sector, we get some payment from patients, and from the health insurance system together. Outpatients come here because they can have access to our incredibly experienced doctors, our technology, and do not have to pay such a high price for it. In some private hospitals in Turkey, there are no agreements with the social

security institution (SGK), so all the money must come from the patient or private insurance: at Medipol, all of our departments are supported by the SGK.

We currently have around 25,000 patients a year coming from other countries – mainly Iraq, Libya, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan, and some Balkan countries. Of our 500 beds, we currently have 72 patients from abroad. We also have some private insurance patients, but not as many as international patients.

How do you promote Medipol internationally?

We have an international department with around 50 staff, which works to attract patients from abroad. We currently have an agreement with a number of foreign governments to bring patients here, and offices in Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, with plans to open another in Iraq.

What are you hoping to achieve in the next five years for Medipol?

In our hospital system, this is the largest hospital, and we additionally have five smaller hospitals, which have an average of 50 beds each. In the future, we want to expand those hospitals to a larger scale. Two construction projects are currently underway, one of which will result in a 400-bed hospital, to be completed in the next two years, and another which will result in a 600-bed hospital. The next step after this is a 1,000-bed hospital, which will be part of an expanded university campus that will include faculties of law, pharmacy, engineering, and finance, as well as medicine. So in five years, we hope to have moved from a 700-bed capacity to 3,000 or 4,000 beds.

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