

An Effective Leader in The Foundation of Modern Nursing: Professor Besim Ömer Akalın

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Abstract

Besim Ömer Akalın was a military physician who contributed to the development of medicine as well as the foundation and development of other health professions. He published several works to raise social awareness of health and healthcare, and also served as active member and administrator during foundation and early development of institutions related to charity and community health including Ottoman Red Crescent, Child Protection Institution, and Association of Fight against Tuberculosis. He argued that patient care should be provided by those individuals who have received an education in the relevant field, and made considerable efforts to realize the participation of Turkish women in patient care. He made great contributions to the organization of the development of the nursing profession in Turkey and their undertaking of modern nursing roles.

Key Words: Besim Ömer Akalın, History of Turkish Nursing, Development of Nursing in Turkey.

Öz

Türkiye’de Modern Hemşireliğin Kurulmasında Etkili Bir Lider: Profesör Besim Ömer Akalın

Askeri hekim olan Besim Ömer Paşa, hem tıbbın gelişiminde hem de diğer sağlık mesleklerinin kuruluş ve gelişimlerinde önemli katkılarda bulunmuştur. Bir yandan halkı sağlık konusunda bilinçlendirmek için yayınlar yapmış, diğer yandan Kızılay, Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu, Verem Savaş Derneği gibi hayırseverlik ve toplum sağlığı ile ilgili kurumların kuruluş dönemlerinde aktif üye ve yönetici olarak görev almıştır. Hasta bakımını bu konuda eğitim almış kişilerin yapması gerektiğini savunmuş; Türk kadınının hasta bakımına katılmasını sağlamış ve bunun için yoğun uğraşlar vermiştir. Hemşirelik mesleğinin Türkiye’deki gelişimi, örgütlenmesi ve modern hemşirelik rollerini üstlenmesinde büyük katkıları olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Besim Ömer Akalın, Türk Hemşirelik Tarihi, Türkiye’de Hemşireliğin Gelişimi.

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Care of Patients During The Ottoman Period

Patient care at Ottoman healthcare institutions was provided by men and women who were not trained about it (1-3). The staff at the hospital were responsible both for cleaning of the ward and for the patient care as well. Patient care included services such as following the doctors order for their patients, feeding/helping patients who cannot eat on their own, giving them water and medication, covering patients with blankets during the night shift and keeping sheets clean (3-4).

During and after the Crimean War, there was only one community hospital in Istanbul and patient care was not emphasized enough. Although Florence Nightingale’s novel principles in nursing became globally known and a new era of the profession had begun, health institutions of Ottoman were unaware of these developments. There were only medical schools as educational institutions. At that time, health of the soldiers was focused on, and new military hospitals were being built. However, in these new hospitals, the patient care was carried out by disabled and uneducated soldiers. The caregivers within the society, who were preparing medicines and carrying out patient care and treatment, on the other hand, were training each other in a master-apprentice relationship (3-5).

Red Crescent (Hilal-i Ahmer) Society (Association), which was founded by the recommendation of the Red Cross, opened hospitals for the wounded near the war zones as well as in Istanbul during the Ottoman-Russian war (1877-1878) which took place later. Treatment and care services in these hospitals were carried out by the Red Cross delegations. After the war, Red Cross physicians and caregivers returned to their own countries and the activities of Red Crescent came to an end, assuming that it would not be needed any more (3).

Realizing The Lack of Educated Patient Caregiver in Turkey

Besim Ömer Pasha, who had graduated as a military physician (1885), subsequently worked in obstetrics and gynecology department in Paris between 1885 and 1889. During the period when he worked in Paris, he saw that the female nurses who graduated from the nursing school provided great services to the patients, and then he went to London in 1887 where he visited the Florence Nightingale School of Nursing and was impressed by the order and discipline of the school (3,6).

Besim Ömer Pasha, after realizing the importance of education in patientcare during the years he spent in Paris, assumed the responsibility of training midwives when he was back to İstanbul in 1889. In the first year, he gave lessons about patient care. This was the first patientcare education in Turkey (4,7).

The education of midwives was a good start for the country, but it was not enough. There was a need for trained caregivers who would provide patientcare. Because the soldiers who were injured during the battle were being managed by people who had no knowledge of patient care. During the Ottaman-Greek war (1897), management of the ill and injured soldiers of the Ottoman Army was mostly carried out by uneducated and injured soldiers. Besim Ömer Pasha noticed the inadequacy of patient care during this war and expressed his opinions on this (3).

The first person to realize the need for nursing profession in our country was Dr. Besim Ömer Pasha (8). Besim Ömer

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Pasha's experiences in foreign countries had played an important role for him to notice the insufficiency in patient care in our country. Particularly the International Red Cross meetings, which he attended as the Ottoman Delegate, had gave him an opportunity to see the improvements in patient care in other countries. At these meetings, he realized the need of change for a system which includes nurses rather than caregivers, and the importance given to nursing in the world (2).

On participating in the Red Cross Congress, held in Washington in 1911, Dr. Besim Ömer Pasha observed that nursing is a profession and separated into branches. He also noticed that registered nurses were providing numerous services and they were organized. He brought examples of nursing uniforms on this visit (6,9).

The participation of Omer Pasha in the Congress of the Red Cross has been important in terms of taking the experiences of other countries in the care of patients. Pasha experienced an interesting event on a journey he had to participate in one of the Red Cross meetings. Pasha had a ticket to Titanic, which sank on April 15, 1912, to attend the International Red Cross meeting, but he missed the trip (10). Thanks to this coincidence, Pasha survived.

Besim Ömer Pasha also attended another meeting which was called IX. Washington International Salib-i-Ahmer Conference as an Ottoman delegate on 10 May 1912. The German delegates at the conference told that nurses were trained for the Red Cross in their countries. They explained that the nursing students were educated at the Red Cross houses for a year under the supervision of a nurse, and by the teacher nurses. The delegates of United States and France also started that these kinds of activities had been carried out in their countries and that they obtained very good results. The nurse training program of France was described in detail, and it was mentioned that the program consists of two phases, advanced and basic, and contains both theoretical and practical lessons. The Japanese delegate explained the difficulties related to the education of female nurses in their country at the conference. It was also reported that Japanese nurses had encountered difficulties at first due to the traditions which makes it unacceptable that a Japanese woman could look after a man outside of the family, and that the nurses were approached with prejudice. It was also told that in order to overcome that situation, Japanese nurses were carefully selected from all social classes, and that the voluntary contributions of women from the higher classes of society had played an important role in overcoming prejudices (8,10). It can be said that the observations that Besim Ömer Pasha made during these meetings that he attended influenced the nursing education which he tried to install in our country.

The lack of trained and experienced caregivers during Trablusgarp (1911) and Balkan (1912) wars led to difficulties in patient care and resulted with massive losses in the army. These losses forced Dr. Besim Ömer Pasha who was well aware of the urgent need of the caregivers took action (11). Besim Ömer Pasha, warned the Red Crescent Association, stated that the country was in need of caregivers and that it is essential to introduce a course to train the caregivers. Then, in 1912, a 6-month-long voluntary nursing course was opened in Kadirga Hospital. Thus, the formal nursing education had begun for the first time in Turkey. During the course, lectures on topics such as wound care and removal of microbes were given to students by Dr. Besim Ömer Paşa. This course drew the attention of the most well-cultured societies of Istanbul thanks to the individual efforts of Dr Besim Ömer Pasha (2). This initiative created by Besim Ömer Pasha shows that our country was influenced by Japan to introduce the concept of female nurses.

In 1913–14, five-month-long nursing training courses were run in which there were lessons given by Besim Ömer Pasha himself in the Darülfünun (Istanbul University) conference halls. A wide group of ladies participated in this course. At the end of the course, each participant was awarded with a certificate. Three of these participants, Kerime Salahor, Safiye Hüseyin Elbi and Münire İsmail, provided voluntary patient care during the Battle of Çanakkale and the Balkan, and exhibited great sacrifice and dedication (3,5-6,12). The struggles of these ladies, who could be called pioneers of nursing in our country, can be considered as the first steps towards shaping our current nursing.

Besim Ömer Pasha believed that it was necessary for caregivers to receive practical and theoretical education and to be tested accordingly; he ensured that the women who participated in patient care courses were given a certificate acknowledging their new skills and understanding (8). Through this process of examination and certification, Besim Ömer Pasha and others like him—individuals who shared his opinion about importance of nursing and patient care—showed the extent to which they took the caregiving course seriously (1-2).

Besim Ömer Pasha argued that the nursing profession which was contemporaneously being performed mostly by men, is one peculiar to females. Due to the negative social impact to nursing, Turkish women were not allowed to work. This resulted in the slow development of the nurse profession in Turkey (1-2,8).

Despite all the negative social comments, Dr. Besim Ömer Pasha argued that nursing is a separate discipline and that special training in this area was necessary and put great efforts in this aspect. Dr. Besim Ömer Paşa brought painters from Europe to show the society the importance of nursing, and asked them to draw the watercolor paintings of nurses when they were performing their duties. These pictures were reproduced as postcards and stamps, the society was informed about nursing, and the ladies were invited to the profession by this way (4,13).

At this time no books about nursing existed in Turkish. Besim Ömer Pasha wrote books on nursing to support the education and increase the attention of society. Among his books, First Aid (İlk İmdat), Nursing (Hastabakıcılık), About Nurse (Hastabakıcılığa Dair), and Moral Duties and One-Day Duty of A Nurse at the Time of War (Ahlaki Vezaif ve Harp Zamanında Hastabakıcının Bir Günlük Vazifesi) were published. Dr. Besim Ömer Pasha copied his book, Moral Duties and One-Day Duty of A Nurse at the Time of War and distributed copies, without charge, to women in nursing education, thereby enabling them to use the book while preparing for their exams. Moreover, Besim Ömer Pasha attributed this book to the nurses with the statement “My Gift for our Caregivers, our Honorable Compassionate Nurses” (8).

The need for patient care, which was necessary in the Ottoman Empire which was involved in a war after another war, became prominent during World War I (1916). It is known that 7 Red Cross Nurses sent by the German Emperor were looking after the injured people with volunteer Turkish nurses. However, this extremely limited contribution was an inadequate

solution to meet the need for nursing (1). In those years (1917) the number of caregivers who were trained in courses in Turkey were 284. In the same year, there were 67.000 caregivers in Germany, 12.960 caregivers in Hungary, 2.804 caregivers in Australia and 1.500 caregivers in Bulgaria (3). These figures are important as they represent the importance which was given to the nursing in our country at that time.

Nursing During The Republic Period

Due to the increased rights afforded to women by Atatürk during the early Republic period, which allowed them to work, and the urgent need of nurses, Besim Ömer Pasha was given the chance to put his opinions into practice (7). Thanks to the contributions made by Besim Ömer Akalın—the same Besim Ömer Pasha after he had taken the surname Akalın on the proclamation of the new Republic—the Red Crescent Patient Caregiver School was founded as an institution, one affiliated with the Red Crescent Society, and whose name was subsequently changed to Red Crescent Private Nursing School. The school opened with 16 students who were enrolled in a study program lasting two years and three months (14). The first graduates of this school were appointed to the position of Chief Nurse, and they also addressed the management of patient care.

The school's study period was subsequently increased to two years and six months in 1930, and then to four years in 1958. Some graduates from the school—which was led by Besim Ömer Pasha—were sent to the United States of America to participate in both undergraduate and postgraduate study programs. Some esteemed individuals, such as Prof. Eren Kum, Prof. Leman Birol, Prof. Perihan Velioğlu formed the core teaching and administrative staff of nursing schools in Turkey (2).

Another important contribution of Besim Ömer Pasha to our profession was to introduce organization in Nursing. Besim Ömer Pasha organized the nurses by establishing the current "Turkish Nurses Association" on August 23, 1933 (6). The organization movement which was begun by Besim Ömer Pasha's support have grown over time and there are many specific specialty associations apart from the Turkish Nurses Association now. The current number of specific specialty associations is over twenty (15).

Conclusion

Prof. Besim Ömer Akalın argued that nursing was a female profession. He realized the importance of formal education in nursing and took steps accordingly, making considerable effort to raise awareness about it in Turkey.

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