

# THE OPINION OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS ON THEIR WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE TURKISH HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

A. UĞUR

FAMILY DOCTOR, TURKEY

In Turkey, family practice residency programs have run since 1985 and there are approximately 800 family physicians and 400 residents today. Family physicians work either in the public or private sectors, but the relative percentages are uncertain. In the public sector they are mostly detailed to the Health Centres, Centres for Mother and Child Care and Family Planning, inpatient health care centres, hospitals of the Turkish Ministry of Health and the health care centres of the other ministries (1). There is not sufficient information about the working conditions of family physicians in Turkey (2). There is a need for qualified primary health care physicians in Turkey, but on the other hand, family physicians are seeking a more appropriate working environment.

The aim of this preliminary report was to assess the expectations of Turkish family physicians concerning appropriate working environment. It is difficult to perform a satisfactory sampling to represent all the family physicians in Turkey. Therefore it was decided to perform this study during the 4<sup>th</sup> National Family Physicians Congress 1999, Istanbul. Two hundred eighteen specialists and residents in family medicine participated in the congress. All of them were asked to participate in this survey. The questionnaires of 58 specialists and 38 residents which were fully completed have been included in the study (response rate 44%). The participants were asked to fill a questionnaire with 12 close ended questions (having "other" choice in the answers) which contained questions on sociodemographics, working experiments, appropriate working conditions for family physicians

and the preferable properties of working conditions.

The data was evaluated with the chi-square method. The significance level has been set at 0.05.

The mean post graduate period after the medical faculty for the residents was 5,7 years with 3,1 minimum and 8,4 maximum. The mean postgraduate period for the specialists was 10,6 with 7,5 minimum and 13,7 maximum. Seventy six percent of the specialists and 63% of the residents had experience in the private sector.

Thirty six percent of the specialists and 76.3% of the residents identified their most work satisfaction during residency. The specialists further mentioned they were satisfied during their work in private sector (19%), and governmental posts (10.3%). Residents revealed governmental health centres (10.5%) and private sector (5%) as satisfactory work periods.

The most appropriate working places for a family physician in Turkey emphasised by specialists were private offices (28%), government inpatient health clinics of (16%), ACSAP (12%) while residents identified private offices (21%), government inpatient health clinics (16%), government hospitals (13%) and private insurance companies (10%). When family physicians were asked about ideal working places specialists and residents made similar choices, but specialists preferred to work in private offices more than the residents. This difference must have been influenced by the fact that residents are not permitted to work in private offices(1).

	Specialists (n=58) %	Residents (n=38) %	p	X <sup>2</sup>
Private offices	64	42	<0.05	4.37
Private insurance company	52	66	>0.05	
ACSAP	48	60		
Inpatient health clinic	47	39		
Government hospital	19	45	<0.01	7.38
In house physician	43	37	>0.05	
Occupational medicine	38	63		
Training staff in universities	36	42		
Official health care units	33	18		
Health care units of the universities	21	34		
Travellers medicine	24	24		
Health administrator	14	16		
Family practice centre	10	8		

Table 1: Opinions of the participants about the most appropriate working places for a family physician in Turkey. (When their top five choices are counted)



An interesting finding is that preference of the private sector is among the first two choices of an ideal working environment, by both specialists and also residents. Other studies have shown that, besides the desire to become a family physician, medical doctors also prefer to live in big cities once they have passed a speciality examination. The physicians in our study also preferred to work in big cities, while on the other hand the Ministry of Health employs them in the rural districts. Resignation from the government service to work in the private sector is often the outcome of the difficulty in obtaining official appointments in the big cities (3).

Family physicians with these expectations do not find that the services performed in the Health Centres, Centres for Mother and Child Care and Family Planning are compatible with the concepts of family practice. Ninety three percent of these cannot practice family practice and 7% are not able to practice any clinical science. The ones working in government hospitals have problems with physicians from other specialities regarding management issues, duties and responsibilities. The most important problem is the lack of opportunities to apply the knowledge learned during the residency program(1,4).

In conclusion, 84% of family physicians are not satisfied with their existing medical conditions. Turkish family physicians are looking for a frame of work more commensurate with their past occupational

experience, the clinical skills they developed in the residency program and their accumulated knowledge about family practice (in Turkey and in other countries). On the other hand, most of them prefer to live in big cities. With some changes in the regulations, the shift to the private sector would be prevented. Additionally it may be possible to incorporate the private sector health care organisations into the government health care system (3).

#### REFERENCES

1. Yaman H, Özen M. Satisfaction with Family Medicine Training in Turkey: a survey of Residents. *Croat Med J* 2002;43(1):54-5.
2. Görpelioğlu S. Family Medicine as a Medical Speciality in Turkey [in Turkish]. In: Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> National Family Medicine Days. Edirne. Trakya University Publ. 2001:13-20.
3. Yaman H. Training in Family Medicine: The Current State in Turkey. *Education for Primary Care* 2002 (in Press).
4. Yıldırım A, Kosku N, Samancı T, Oskay YG. The Expectations of the Family Physicians from Their Speciality [in Turkish]. Proceedings of the 4<sup>th</sup> National Congress of Family Medicine. Istanbul: Turkish Association Family Medicine Publ.. 1999:73.