Interview: Uğur Baran – General Secretary, OHSAD, Turkey



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Dr. Uğur Baran, general secretary of OHSAD – Turkey's Private Hospital and Health Organizations Association – highlights how he is striving to keep open the dialogue between the association and the government over key issues such as reimbursement policy, the role of private hospitals for the country and how partnerships between the public and private entities can continue to flourish.

What is the vision for OHSAD?

OHSAD was founded in 2004, and over the past 15 years, the private healthcare sector has accumulated a gross amount of experience of how to manage the private healthcare system. This evolvement of experience has paved the way for the country to begin promoting its expertise in the private healthcare system towards other global healthcare systems. This is our vision for 2023, we want to become a reference private healthcare system.

Moreover, the key issue for the future is regarding the government and the authorities deciding on the future of private healthcare and their vision moving forward. Currently, the Ministry of Health is discussing how they want to place private healthcare in the whole eco-system in 2023. We are continuously communicating with the government about this issue and discussing how we can continue to have a strong relationship over the upcoming years.

What are the main changes needed to improve the quality of the healthcare system?

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The most important challenge that Turkey's healthcare system faces, especially in the private sector, is financing. Private hospitals are still at the mercy of the country's Social Security Institution (SGK), therefore the stagnation of the reimbursement prices has become a problem for our members. However, we are optimistic that the prices of reimbursement will increase, and one of OHSAD's main agenda's is to keep open the dialogue about this issue. Furthermore, Turkey's private sector plays a huge role in the country's economy, employing 250 000 healthcare workers, and helping to solve significant problems in the whole healthcare sector. We feel that Turkey would not be the same without its private healthcare and so we need to see changes in the financing and reimbursements of the system.

Additionally, another challenge that will soon present itself in Turkey's healthcare system is the issue of an aging population. Over half of the population is below the age of 31, however, this is set to change due to advances in medication prolonging life. We see this as a problem, however, we are preparing solutions for the aging population and we will be ready to serve our people.

When you compare Turkey to other OECD countries, the satisfaction of our healthcare system is much higher. We are the best healthcare system compared to these countries, but also the cheapest and ready for the advancements and challenges set to come.

Do you feel that the relationship between the public and private sector needs to change?

In Turkey, there is a strong relationship between the public and private hospitals but also a good balance between the two because of the Health Transformation Programme, which spanned ten years from 2003. The main outcome of the HTP resulted in large projects based on private public partnerships, such as the creation of "city hospitals*" [with some of them holding 2000+ beds – Ed.]* . These hospitals were built on land provided by the government, financed by the private sector and sustained with employees from the government.

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This example highlights how the relationship between the public and private sector will continue to progress. Some of these joint projects have already finished with functioning hospitals, others are still ongoing and are yet to be finished. Therefore, I do not think the relationship needs to change, as it is picking up momentum and transforming the healthcare sector with different initiatives. This unique relationship is an initiative the whole world can take note of and begin to explore the

possibility.

What is your assessment of the private healthcare sector throughout Turkey, and not just in the major cities?

In Turkey, we represent 80 percent of the 600 private hospitals in the country, with only 160 of them located in Istanbul. Although we need to increase the capacity of these hospitals for the population, this is not a priority because our services are well received and satisfactory and the opinion of the government is that we are serving enough of the population. The essential incentives now are to see more investments in quality and improvements, looking at the further implementation of digitalization and artificial intelligence.

Finally, the hospitals in Turkey are local emergency or intensive care units, but these hospitals are the perfect solution for those living around the location, making it a family healthcare unit due to its easy access and success in serving its purpose.

What would be your final message to our international readers about Turkey's private healthcare system?

The private healthcare system plays a significant role in the country's healthcare eco-system and has gained a considerable amount of experience.

Therefore, we are willing to take the lead in promoting our experience and becoming a world reference in this area. We have already taken the steps to educate different countries about our systems and management style, having worked with countries like Bulgaria, Serbia, and other Arabic Countries.

Furthermore, we believe that even Western European countries can import our initiatives and implement them in their own healthcare. However, the public sector must be ready to communicate with the private sector, something we have remarkably achieved in Turkey. Without this dialogue, there is no chance of integration of the two sectors.

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