

Transforming Health Care in Turkey: Achievements and Controversy

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Purpose

- Describe the main components of the recent reforms in health care (The Health Transformation Program) in Turkey
- Analyze the effects of the program on health indicators
- Discuss potential impact of the program on public health and nursing
- Examine controversial components of the program

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Map of Turkey



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The Turkish Context

- Bridge between Europe and Asia
- Slightly larger than Texas
- 17th largest economy in the world
- In the last quarter, fastest growing economy in the world
- Population of 75 million
- GDP per capita – about \$14,700
- The only stable secular democracy in the world with a large Muslim majority

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Turkish Context

- Prior to 2003, major issues with the health care delivery system:
 - Poor population health status indicators
 - Disparities between rural / urban as well as low / middle income families
 - Major inefficiencies in health care delivery
 - Excessive fragmentation
 - Incomplete health insurance coverage
 - Duplication of services
 - Low productivity and technical quality
 - Shortages of facilities and personnel in the East and South-East parts of Turkey

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Why Are Health Reforms Needed?

- Cost of health care:
 - Globally, health care costs are increasing rapidly
 - Effects of aging population on health care costs
 - Increases in non-communicable, chronic diseases
 - Adoption of new technologies

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Why Are Health Reforms Needed?

- Changes in expectations
 - Economic reasons
 - As countries get wealthier, they tend to spend more on health care
 - Social reasons
 - As communications and travel expand across the world, individuals are aware of better health care provisions
 - Political reasons
 - In democratic societies, politicians need to respond to higher expectations in health care

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Health Transformation Program

- Developed by the Turkish Ministry of Health under the majority government of conservative/religious leaning AK Party.
- With the overall objective of improving:
 - Governance
 - Efficiency
 - User and provider satisfaction
 - Long-term fiscal sustainability
- Initial financing by a loan from the World Bank (\$130 million)

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Major Components of the Health Transformation Program

- Strengthening Ministry of Health's capacity for effective stewardship
- Universal health insurance
- Reorganizing health service delivery
- Human resource development
- National health information system

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Effective Stewardship by the Ministry of Health:

- Transition of the ministry from mainly being a provider of services to being a policy maker and regulator of service provision
- Strong decentralization
- Criticized as a neo-liberal approach

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Universal Health Insurance

- Establishment of a single health insurance fund by means of consolidating four existing schemas
- Expansion of health insurance to all Turkish citizens
- Premium based insurance
- Criticized for not being based on general taxation

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Reorganization of the delivery system

- Adoption of family medicine as an organizational model for delivery of outpatient or primary services
 - Per capita payments to family physicians up to 3,500 patients
- Greater autonomy to public hospitals
- New patient referral system
- Improving public health programs through community health centers
- Criticized for not being truly family or community oriented

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Human Resource Development

- Health personnel education
- Restructuring of work schedules of physicians in the public sector (full time only)
- Training of physicians (not nurses) for family medicine
- Performance based supplementary payment system
- Criticized by all professional organizations for favoring private and private hospital practice

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National Health Information System

- Development of standards
- Establishment of the infrastructure
- Establishment of information flows between various components of the health care system
- National health data bases
- All stakeholders seem to support this effort

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Accomplishments:

- Nearly all Turkish citizens are under a single insurance system
- Freedom to choose a family physician
- Freedom to choose any public hospital
- Freedom to choose participating private hospitals with higher co-pays
- Community health center in each city/ town
- Nearly completed National Health Information System

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Possible Impact of Accomplishments

- Infant mortality rates (under 1 year of age) down from 29 per 1000 in 2003 to 10 in 2010
- Life expectancy up from 70.9 to 73.7 (76.1 for women)
- Infant vaccination rates at 97%
- Higher satisfaction rates with health care services (39.5% to 73.1%)
- Burden of out-of-pocket expenditures declined
- Productivity in hospitals improved

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Controversies/Criticisms

- Premium based insurance and co-pays are a burden on lower income people
 - \$100 per month per person premium
 - Per visit (\$2 to \$10) and prescription charges (\$2)
 - 20% out of pocket medication costs
 - 30% out of pocket private hospital costs
- Urban - Rural differences in quantity and quality of services
- Treatment focus
- Neo-liberal approach with privatization and profit orientation

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Controversies – Continued

- ❑ Difficulty in coordinating and implementing national preventative health projects
- ❑ Possibility of rejection of patients with chronic diseases by family physicians
- ❑ Family medicine only as a delivery system to individuals, not to families or communities
- ❑ Delays in wider implementation of the family medicine system

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Controversies – Continued

- ❑ Major health personnel shortages in public hospitals and medical centers
- ❑ Strong resistance to change from medical associations
- ❑ Nursing lumped together with other support personnel
- ❑ Health care expenditures went from \$20 billion to \$40 billion
- ❑ Pharmaceutical expenditures went from \$1 billion to \$12 billion

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Conclusion

- ❑ Reform in health care is unavoidable
- ❑ Building consensus, even with a very strong central government, is difficult due to ideological orientation of stakeholders
- ❑ Even though the Turkish Health Transformation Program has major shortcomings, the public seem to welcome it
- ❑ The Health Transformation Program is a reflection of the neo-liberal priorities of the current popular government, which has overseen the impressive socio-economic transformation of the country in the last decade

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QUESTIONS?

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