CONFERENCE PAPER

Hulusi Behçet's Contributions to Medicine

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Abstract
Hulusi Behçet (1889–1948), a pioneering Turkish dermatologist and scientist, is globally renowned for identifying Behçet's Disease, a systemic vasculitis that now bears his name. Beyond this landmark discovery, Behçet made significant contributions to dermatology, venereology, and infectious diseases through extensive clinical observations and over 200 scholarly publications. He advocated a multidisciplinary approach to diagnosis and was among the earliest proponents of integrating laboratory medicine into dermatological practice in Türkiye. His influence extended to medical education, where he played a key role in modernizing curricula and promoting research-based clinical training. This paper aims to provide a historical overview of Behçet's contributions, contextualizing his work within both national and international developments in early 20th-century medicine. By examining his publications and institutional legacy, we argue that Hulusi Behçet not only discovered a disease but also reshaped medical thinking in his region and era.

Key words: Hulusi Behçet, Behçet's Disease, Dermatology, History of Medicine, Türkiye

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Introduction

Hulusi Behçet (1889–1948) stands as a pivotal figure in the history of modern Turkish medicine, best known for his description of *Behçet's Disease*, a chronic multisystemic disorder characterized by oral and genital ulcers and ocular inflammation. First described in 1937, this syndrome was later internationally recognized and named after him, marking the first time a Turkish physician had a disease named in his honor (Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666; Üstün, 2002, pp.135–137).

Trained in dermatology and internal medicine in Istanbul and Germany, Behçet's career reflected the transformation of the Ottoman medical system into a more scientifically grounded and institutionally structured form during the early Republican era. His clinical acumen, particularly in dermatology and venereal diseases, enabled him to document and publish over 200 scientific papers in national and international journals (Korkmaz, 2023, pp. 41–44; Satar, 2009, pp. 15–19). Behçet emphasized clinical observation supported by laboratory analysis, and he was instrumental in promoting interdisciplinary collaboration in diagnosis and treatment (Satar, 2009, pp.15–19).

In addition to his clinical work, Behçet significantly contributed to the modernization of medical education in Türkiye. As a professor at Istanbul University, he helped shape generations of physicians by integrating research into medical training. His efforts coincided with the university reforms initiated in 1933, which aimed to align Turkish medical practice with Western scientific standards (Korkmaz, 2023, pp.43–44).

More broadly, Behçet's intellectual legacy reflects the internationalization of Turkish medicine in the interwar period. His publications in German, French, and English opened channels of communication with global scientific communities, particularly in Europe and the United States (Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666; Üstün, 2002, pp. 136–137; Tüzün, 2009, pp. 24–27).

The recognition of *Behçet's Disease* by the international medical community served not only as personal validation but also symbolized Türkiye's growing scientific relevance (Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666).

This study aims to contextualize Hulusi Behçet's contributions to medical science within his historical and institutional settings, evaluating his scientific work, academic influence, and legacy in light of both Turkish and international developments in 20th-century medicine.

Materials and Methods

his study adopts a historical-analytical method to examine the medical and scientific contributions of Hulusi Behçet within the broader context of 20th-century Turkish and global medicine. Primary and secondary sources were

selected through academic databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar, using search terms including "*Hulusi Behçet*," "*Behçet's Disease*," "*Turkish medical history*," and "*history of dermatology in Türkiye*." Preference was given to peer-reviewed articles, full-text books, conference papers, and encyclopedia entries available through open access or institutional archives.

The selection process prioritized works that explored Behçet's clinical discoveries, academic influence, and the historical significance of his contributions to modern Turkish medicine. Texts were critically analyzed to extract recurring themes such as clinical methodology, international collaborations, academic reform, and diagnostic innovation. The methodological framework was informed by historical research standards and ethical scholarship practices.

Results

Clinical Discovery: Identification of *Behçet's Disease*

Hulusi Behçet's most renowned contribution to medicine is the identification of a triad of symptoms—oral and genital ulcers and ocular inflammation—that came to be known as *Behçet's Disease*. This discovery, first reported in 1937, represented a pioneering example of clinical pattern recognition based on empirical observation (Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666; Üstün, 2002, pp. 135–137). Although initial reception was skeptical, the international medical community eventually acknowledged it as a distinct clinical entity, confirmed by global diagnostic criteria in the 1940s (Satar, 2009, pp. 15–19; Korkmaz, 2023, pp. 41–44).

Contributions to Dermatology and Venereology

As a professor of dermatology and venereal diseases at Istanbul University, Behçet published extensively on skin disorders, syphilis, and bacterial infections, shaping medical education in the early Republican era (Üstün, 2002, pp. 136–138; Satar, 2009, pp. 15–18). His ability to merge dermatological diagnostics with systemic symptomatology paved the way for more integrative approaches to internal medicine. His textbooks, lectures, and clinical observations influenced a generation of Turkish physicians and played an important role in the modernization of dermatology and venereology education in Türkiye (Korkmaz, 2023, pp. 41–43; Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666).

Academic and Institutional Legacy

Beyond his clinical work, Behçet played a pivotal role in modernizing Turkish medical education. He contributed to curriculum development, was involved in academic reforms after the 1933 University Reform, and actively participated in building scientific terminology in Turkish (Korkmaz, 2023, pp. 41–43; Sa-

tar, 2009, pp. 15–19). His influence extended beyond national borders, as he maintained correspondence with European medical scholars and contributed to international journals (Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666; Üstün, 2002, pp. 136–137).

International Recognition and Legacy

Behçet's Disease is now recognized globally, and his name is immortalized in the nomenclature of the syndrome. The World Health Organization officially recognized it as a separate disease entity in the late 20th century (Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666; Satar, 2009, pp. 17–19; Korkmaz, 2023, pp. 41–44). His work continues to inspire research, particularly in immunology, rheumatology, and vascular medicine (Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666; Üstün, 2002, pp. 136–137).

Discussion

Hulusi Behçet's contributions to medicine demonstrate a profound intersection of clinical observation, academic rigor, and visionary foresight. His identification of what would later become known as *Behçet's Disease* not only established him as a pioneer in dermatology and systemic disorders but also marked a turning point in clinical nosology. The recognition of a triad of recurrent oral aphthae, genital ulcers, and ocular inflammation as a distinct syndrome laid the groundwork for a global understanding of complex multisystemic diseases (Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666; Satar, 2009, pp. 15–19).

A key element in Behçet's scientific legacy lies in his methodological discipline. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who often attributed such symptoms to unrelated etiologies, Behçet approached patient patterns with remarkable consistency and empirical verification. This patient-centric model—analyzing recurrent symptom clusters—would later resonate with diagnostic criteria developed by international rheumatology associations (Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666; Üstün, 2002, pp. 135–138).

In a broader historical context, Behçet's work aligned with the scientific modernization efforts of early Republican Türkiye, where national reforms sought to reframe education, healthcare, and research within a secular, Western-oriented paradigm (Korkmaz, 2023, pp. 41–44; Satar, 2009, pp. 15–19). His contributions were not limited to clinical breakthroughs; he was a central figure in establishing academic dermatology in Türkiye and mentoring future generations of medical professionals (Üstün, 2002, pp. 135–138).

Internationally, despite some initial skepticism—especially from European circles—his findings eventually gained recognition, underscoring the importance of regional medical knowledge in shaping global medicine (Turgut and

Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666; Üstün, 2002, pp. 136–137). Today, the term "*Behçet's Disease*" is universally accepted and included in major medical curricula and diagnostic manuals worldwide, such as the International Criteria for *Behçet's Disease* (ICBD), validating the long-term impact of his clinical acumen (Korkmaz, 2023, pp. 41–44; Satar, 2009, pp. 17–19).

Moreover, Behçet's career exemplifies the complex dynamics of scientific credibility and cross-cultural knowledge validation. His work challenges the dominant Eurocentric historiography of medical innovation, offering a compelling example of how scientific advancement can emerge from peripheral academic settings and still influence global standards (Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666; Üstün, 2002, pp. 136–138).

Conclusion

Hulusi Behçet's contributions to the field of medicine exemplify the intersection of empirical observation, national scientific development, and global medical discourse. His ability to identify and classify a previously undefined multisystem disease stands as a hallmark of 20th-century clinical innovation. Moreover, his academic work and institutional efforts placed Türkiye on the map of international dermatology and systemic disease research (Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666; Üstün, 2002, pp. 135–137; Tüzün, 2009, pp. 24–27).

Behçet's career highlights the importance of recognizing non-Western contributions to global medical knowledge. His legacy is not only measured by the eponymous disease but also by the methodologies and academic structures he helped shape in modern Turkish medicine (Korkmaz, 2023, pp. 41–44; Satar, 2009, pp. 15–19; Tüzün, 2009, pp. 24–27).

As medicine continues to evolve in a globalized context, revisiting the work of figures like Behçet enables a more inclusive understanding of scientific progress and its cultural entanglements (Turgut and Turgut, 2020, pp. 665–666).

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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