Dr. Hulusi Behcet

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Dr. Hulusi Behcet was born on 20th February, 1889, in Istanbul, Turkey. He lost his mother when he was a child and was brought up by his grandmother. His primary education was at Damascus where his father conducted business. The surname Behcet was actually his grandfather’s name, which his father, Ahmet had adopted as the surname. Behcet signifies shining and brilliant (which Behcet was).

Behcet joined Military Medical Academy when he was 16 years old. (There were, at that time, no non military medical institutions). After graduation, he specialised in dermatology and venereology and served at the Military hospital during the 1914-18 world war I as a dermatology-venereology specialist. After the end of war, Behcet went to Budafest and Berlin for further training. On his return, he was appointed Head Physician of the Hasköy Venereal Diseases Hospital. Later he joined Gureba Hospital and was Professor at the Istanbul University. He established the department of dermatology and venereology, at the University. He headed the department till 1947.

Behcet was endowed with curiosity, observation, and patience. These qualities undoubtedly contributed to his ability to recognise Behcet’s disease as a separate disease entity. Medicine apart, Behcet had interests in arts and literature. He was well versed in German, French, and Latin languages. He translated in Turkish language articles published in these languages.

Behcet’s main areas of interest were syphilis, leishmaniasis, and mycosis. He published many articles on syphilis and leishmaniasis. In 1940 he published a monogram on syphilis and related dermatosis. (Clinical and Practical Syphilis, Diagnosis, and related Dermatoses). He is credited with the initiation of the first dermato-venereology journal of Turkey. Behcet was an active participant at national and international congresses. He was in the year 1935 honoured at the Budapest Dermatology conference for his work on mycosis.

Behcet’s identification of Behcet’s disease was based on cases he had seen over a fairly long time span - in 1924-25 a female patient with chronic iritis of 40 years duration, who had been diagnosed and treated variously; in 1930, a woman with recurrent episodes of ocular, oral, and genital involvement (not due to tuberculosis, syphilis, or mycosis), and in 1936 a male patient with oral, cutaneous, scrotal, and ocular lesions along with fever and abdominal pain. He surmised that the three patients were divergent manifestations of an unrecognised disease.

Behcet published his first article on Behcet’s disease in 1936. Following it, similar case reports appeared from other countries. After much controversy involving acceptance of the symptom complex as a distinct disease entity, in 1947, during the International Congress at Geneva, Prof. Mischnar named his findings as Morbus Behcet. Presently the terms Behcet’s disease and Behcet’s syndrome are both in vogue, the former being the preferred one.

Behcet received many honours.

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was the first jurk to become a Professor in Turkish academic world. In 1935 he was honoured for his work on dermatosis at the Dermatology Conference in Budapest and with the degree of “ordinarius” in 1939.

Behcet died of heart attack on 8th March 1948.

Posthumously, Behcet continued to be honoured. He was awarded TUBITAK Scientific award in 1975. In 1980, a stamp was released in his commemoration. In 1982 he was awarded Medical Award of Turkish Republic. Commemoration coins in his memory were released by the Turkish mint in 1996. Many laboratories and libraries have been named after him. There are national and international Behcet’s disease societies.

Reference

1. Demirhan Erdemir O. Oncel: Prof. Dr. Hulsi Bechcet's disease from the point of view of the history of medicine and some results. JISHIM 2006;5:51-63.