

## The Arts of Medicine (2023): A Memoir by Dr. Ercan Kesal

### Hekimlik Sanatları (2023): Dr. Ercan Kesal'ın Anı Kitabı

Hekimlik Sanatları [The Arts of Medicine] Ercan Kesal  
İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2023, 151 p.

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#### **Abstract:**

Turkish literature has recently welcomed a significant addition to a neglected medical memoir genre. Ercan Kesal, MD, a versatile health professional with 35 years of experience, who has also gained considerable acclaim in Turkey for his accomplishments as a writer, screenwriter, and actor, has published his memoir essay titled "Hekimlik Sanatları" (The Arts of Medicine) in June 2023. This book delves deep into Kesal's journey as a physician, exploring the multifaceted aspects of the medical profession and its intersection with art and humanities. Among the topics that are particularly interesting and valuable in terms of medical ethics and the history of medicine, the following five stand out: over-commercialization of health, violence against physicians, lack of medical ethics education, psychiatry ethics, and pioneering physicians in the history of Turkish medicine.

**Key Words:** History of medicine, Humanities, Medical ethics, Medicine in literature, Turkey

#### **Özet:**

Türk edebiyatı, ihmal edilmiş bir edebi tür olan tıbbi hatıra alanında dikkate değer, yeni bir eser kazandı. Yazar, senarist ve oyuncu kimliğiyle Türkiye'de yaygın bir üne sahip olan 35 yıllık hekim Ercan Kesal, "Hekimlik Sanatları" adını verdiği anı kitabını Haziran 2023'te yayınladı. Kesal'ın hekimlik kariyerindeki yolculuğunu anlatan bu kitap, tıp mesleğinin çok boyutluluğuna vurgu yaparken tabii sanat ve beşeri bilimlerle kesiştiği noktalara da değiniyor. Kitapta tıp etiği ve tıp tarihi konularına ilişkin ilgi çekici başlıklar arasında ise şu beş konu öne çıkıyor: sağlık aşırı ticarileşmesi, hekime yönelik şiddet, tıp etiği eğitimi eksikliği, psikiyatri etiği ve Türk tıp tarihindeki bazı öncü hekimler.

**Anahatar Sözcükler:** Edebiyatta tıp, Tıp etiği, Tıp tarihi, Tıpta insan bilimleri, Türkiye

Turkish literature has recently welcomed a significant addition to a neglected medical memoir genre. Ercan Kesal, MD, a versatile health professional with 35 years of experience, who has also gained considerable acclaim in Turkey for his accomplishments as a writer, screenwriter, and actor, has published his memoir essay titled Hekimlik Sanatları (The Arts of Medicine) in June 2023 (1).

This book delves deep into Kesal's journey as a physician, exploring the multifaceted aspects of the medical profession and its intersection with art and humanities. Despite its compact size of only 151 pages, the book maintains a chronological framework, enabling readers to explore Kesal's contemplations and viewpoints on medical services, the mindset of healthcare professionals, and the healthcare system's condition, all from a humanistic perspective.

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The Arts of Medicine comprises 18 chapters encompassing a wide range of subjects, commencing with the author's childhood fascination with a meticulously preserved penicillin box in his home. The narrative then transitions to the author's encounters with the first doctor he met in his small village of Avanos in Nevşehir, Central Anatolia. Subsequently, the book delves into the author's experiences as a medical student, rural physician fulfilling his mandatory civil service, independent medical practitioner, manager of a private hospital in Istanbul, and active participation in medical professional organizations. Through his perspective as a physician-author, the book offers a unique outlook that surpasses the conventional understanding of medicine as solely concerned with matters of life, health, and healing.

An important feature distinguishing this book from Kesal's other literary works is the abundance of visuals. Accompanied by more than 50 photographs and documents, the book offers a short autobiographical documentary of the author's 65-year life. Among the topics that are particularly interesting and valuable in terms of medical ethics and the history of medicine, the following five stand out:

1. Over-commercialization of health: The author criticizes the dehumanization of the health system, which perceives it solely as a market. He raises concerns about hospitals being treated as businesses, patients as customers, medicine as a product, and physicians as salespeople.
2. Violence against physicians: Kesal addresses the pressing issue of violence against physicians in Turkish medicine. He attributes the leading cause of conflicts and violence between physicians and patients to the excessive commercialization of healthcare.
3. Lack of medical ethics education: The author highlights the need for medical ethics and the history of medicine departments in many Turkish medical schools. Drawing from the Turkish Medical Association's Pre-Graduate Medical Education Report, he emphasizes the absence of these departments, particularly in faculties established after 1990.
4. Psychiatry ethics: In the chapter "Physician, Psychiatry, and Eylül Psychiatry Center Experience," the author discusses psychiatry ethics. He questions the dominant approach of relying on neuropsychological tests, tomography, and MRI, emphasizing the importance of considering environmental factors that induce the stigmatization and marginalization of individuals with mental health conditions.
5. Pioneering historical physicians: Beşir Fuad, Süheyl Ünver, and Nusret Fişek are three influential Turkish physicians who have significantly impacted the author. Kesal discusses his association with Fişek, a leading advocate of preventive medicine in Turkey, the former President of the Central Council of the Turkish Medical Association, and one of the founders of the Association of Physicians against Nuclear War.

In an era where the traditional perception of *ars medicinae* is being heavily challenged, Kesal's recent memoir emphasizes the fundamental importance of health as a human right rather than a mere professional service. I highly recommend this book to physicians, medical students, and anyone interested in the medical profession as it advocates for the training of humanistic physicians rather than those driven solely by profit and emphasizes the need for a holistic and compassionate approach to patient care, rejecting the reduction of patients to mere medical records.

Ercan Kesal explores a subject of universal relevance deserving recognition and readership from the international medical community. Like his previous book of short stories entitled *Fairy Chimney Soda* (2), also translated into English, the publication of *The Arts of Medicine* in foreign languages would make a culturally specific and precious contribution to the medical humanities internationally.

Conflict of interest: None.

#### References

1. Kesal E. *Hekimlik Sanatları* [The Arts of Medicine]. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları; 2023.
2. Kesal E. *Fairy Chimney Soda*. trans: Alex Dave. London: Anthem Press; 2020.