

Spotlight: Bülent Görenek, MD, FESC, FACC



Aiming to Raise Turkey's Research Profile on the International Stage and Encouraging Colleagues to Do the Same

Bülent Görenek, professor of cardiology and vice director of the Department of Cardiology, Eski ehir Osmangazi University, Eski ehir, Turkey, talks to Judy Özkan, BA.

Born in Ankara, Turkey, in 1965, Bülent Görenek, MD, FESC, FACC, professor of cardiology and vice director of the Department of Cardiology at Eski ehir Osmangazi University, Eski ehir, Turkey, attended primary school in Izmir on Turkey's Aegean coast and completed his secondary education in Eski ehir, a city in central Anatolia. His father was an officer in the Turkish Army, which meant the family moved around the country. However, Eski ehir, an attractive city with 2 universities and good connections with Ankara, Istanbul, and Antalya, is the place that Professor Görenek calls home and is home to most of his relatives.

After high school Görenek decided to follow in the footsteps of his elder brother, Levent Görenek, MD, an undergraduate student at the medical school of Gazi University in Ankara, and now a professor and director of the clinical microbiology and infectious diseases department in the Military Training Hospital in Istanbul. Professor Görenek says, "He encouraged me to like medicine and helped influence my choice of career."

Professor Görenek graduated from Hacettepe University, Ankara, in 1990 and went on to specialty training at the Department of Cardiology of the Eski ehir Osmangazi University School of Medicine, Eski ehir.

"I Started to Work on Experimental Models, and My First Steps in Exploring Cardiac Arrhythmias Were in Maastricht"

After postgraduate training, Professor Görenek spent an inspirational 6 months in the Cardiology Department at the University of Maastricht, Maastricht, the Netherlands. Working with Professor Hein J. J. Wellens, MD, PhD, and Professor Marc A. Vos, PhD, he was introduced to a strand of research that would become his main area of interest: cardiac arrhythmias and electrophysiology. He says his time in Maastricht was "unforgettable and important. I started to work on experimental models, and my first steps in exploring cardiac arrhythmias were in Maastricht. After learning the basics and training in experimental arrhythmia education, I started to work on clinical electrophysiology. An abstract from this study was presented at the 47th American College of Cardiology Annual Scientific Sessions in 1998. The full article, which was published in 1998, set the foundation for further work. It was about the initiation mechanisms of ventricular tachycardia in dog models. I was able to use the data in follow-up research, and it was the first of a series of findings in this area."¹

Having published more than 65 articles in international science citation-indexed cardiology journals and more than 55 articles in the national cardiology journals of Turkey, Professor Görenek enjoys the process of clinical research, from concept to completion. He says, "Even more enjoyable is finishing a manuscript, sending it for review, and then receiving an acceptance letter from the editor."

Professor Görenek's career has been centred at Eski ehir Osmangazi University School of Medicine's Department of Cardiology since 1995. Between 1997 and 2000, he was assistant professor, becoming an associate in 2000 and then a full professor in 2006. In the examinations he took to attain his professorship, he achieved the highest rating ever and is proud of setting the standard for others to follow. In 2006, he also became vice director of the Department of Cardiology at Eski ehir Osmangazi University, and between 2001 and 2006, he was director of the cardiac catheterisation labs. With work falling into 3 main categories "teaching, research, and patient care," he enjoys all environments, but clinical work gives him the most satisfaction. He says, "I feel that, first of all, I am a physician, and that is why I enjoy taking care of the patients. Curing an arrhythmia by catheter ablation and offering the patient an arrhythmia-free life is happiness."

In early January 2010, Professor Görenek completed a long-term project that had been the cause of a few sleepless nights: the publication of a new textbook on cardiac arrhythmias.² The book is the first of its kind for Turkish doctors. He says, "It was quite a task to coordinate 70 or so contributors and edit it. I was very happy when the day came that I could hold it in my hands."

A Small Team With Big Dreams

Compared with many other institutions, the University of Eski ehir is new, having been founded in 1970. Conversely, the Department of Cardiology is 1 of the oldest centres in Turkey, having been founded in 1992. Until then, cardiology was not recognised for training purposes as a separate discipline and was taught under the umbrella of internal medicine.

Although the big-city universities of Ankara, Izmir, and Istanbul tend to dominate the research scene in Turkey, the Department of Cardiology at Eski ehir Osmangazi University is proof that with the right aims and attitudes, it is possible to succeed. It has 55 beds, 1 critical care unit, 1 catheter angiography lab, and 1 invasive electrophysiology



Left, A view of Eski ehir Osmangazi University Hospital, Eski ehir, Turkey. Right, Professor Görenek in the intensive cardiac care unit with fellows and students. Photographs courtesy of Professor Görenek.

lab. Director of the small team with big dreams is Necmi Ata, MD, FESC, whose main area of interest is echocardiography. As vice director, Professor Görenek, assists in leading a team of 7 staff cardiologists, 15 fellows, and 35 nurses. Professor Görenek says the team is happy with its progress and the work it is doing.³⁻⁵ He is particularly proud of its publication record, which is impressive compared with that of many of the larger universities in Turkey.

Professor Görenek credits the team's success with having the right attitude, having confidence, and believing in what you are doing. He says, "A good team needs to believe in itself and that it will achieve. The elements of a good team are people who are communicative, cooperative, problem solving, and respectful individuals. Being a good listener helps achieve solutions faster and with less stress. The team has to work together and help one another when needed."

"Many of My Contemporaries Are Doing Really Good Work, but They Are Not Well Known Outside Turkey"

A series of educational and health reforms, partly to conform with European Union legislation but also to address the problem of cardiovascular disease as a public health issue, has seen cardiology come of age in Turkey. The health system, education, and specialist training programmes have been overhauled to provide better teaching, research, and care, particularly in the field of cardiology. As a result, the new generation of senior academics, clinicians, and researchers is keen to promote its findings and contributions to a wider audience.

One such opportunity came in the form of the 34th Annual Congress of the International Society of Electrophysiology, which Professor Görenek, as president, was responsible for organising in 2007. With a record number of delegates in attendance and high expectations, the pressure to deliver a world-class congress was

immense. He says, "Although lots of people told me how good it was, it was not until the gala dinner that I was able to sit down and say, 'yes, I succeeded.'"

Although state funding for health and education has increased over the past decade in Turkey, important areas still do not qualify. One example is a triannual cardiac arrhythmia summer school in Eski ehir. Despite being a valued resource for young cardiologists and the fact that senior electrophysiologists give their time for free, its future is at risk due to lack of money.

As a relatively young senior academic, Professor Görenek can look forward to continuing his work for many years to come. His only regret is not being able to set up a lab after working in Maastricht. "My aim was to establish an experimental research lab for the work I had started there, but I couldn't, mostly due to lack of funding." One of his future priorities is to raise Turkey's research profile on the international stage and encourage younger colleagues to do the same. "Many of my contemporaries are doing really good work, but they are not well known outside Turkey."

Central to cardiologists in Turkey is the Turkish Society of Cardiology, of which Professor Görenek has been an active member for more than a decade. He has been a scientific committee member since 2008 and was a board member of the working group on arrhythmias between 2006 and 2008.

"With Successful Catheter Ablation, an Arrhythmia- and Drug-Free Life Is Possible for Many Patients"

Professor Görenek is a member of the Education Committee of the European Heart Rhythm Association, is a nucleus member of the European Society of Cardiology Acute Cardiac Care Working Group, and has been involved in many European Society of Cardiology guidelines as a task force member or reviewer. He is also a council member



The 34th International Congress on Electrophysiology, June 24–27, 2007, faculty dinner on a boat on the Bosphorus Strait in Istanbul, Turkey. As president, Professor Görenek was responsible for organising the congress. He says, “With a record number of delegates, and high expectations, the pressure to deliver a world-class congress was immense. Although lots of people told me how good it was, it was not until the gala dinner that I was able to sit down and say, ‘yes, I succeeded.’” Photograph courtesy of Professor Görenek.

of the International Society of Electrophysiology. In the future, he believes that new techniques in catheter ablation of cardiac arrhythmias will be simplified and there will be an increase in the number of arrhythmia centres in Turkey, which he views as a necessity. He says, “We know the adverse effects of antiarrhythmic drugs and that in many patients drugs cannot always control arrhythmic attacks. However, with successful catheter ablation, an arrhythmia and drug-free life is possible for many patients.” The knock-on effect of this is that there will be a need to recruit and train more electrophysiologists.

Professor Görenek’s contributions to cardiology in Turkey have resulted in a number of awards: the Ankara Physician’s Chamber Science and Medicine Award, 2009; the Turkish Society of Cardiology Young Investigator Award (2nd), 1996; and his Scholarship to the Netherlands in 1997, which was funded by the Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey. He received the European Society of Cardiology diploma in 2000 and has been a fellow since 2003; he has also been a fellow of the American College of Cardiology since 2004.

Professor Görenek is married to anaesthetist Emine Sevil Görenek, MD, who works in a state hospital in Eski ehir. A keen supporter of her husband’s career, Dr Emine Görenek understands the time demands of his work. Professor Görenek comments that trips abroad have on occasion proved problematic. He explains, “Unfortunately I was in Nice at Cardioslim 2008 giving a talk when my daughter was born, and I missed one of the biggest and most beautiful days in my family’s life.” Anxious to make up for missing out, Professor Görenek now devotes his free time to looking after his daughter, which he describes as a “great happiness.”

For those who wish to follow a similar career, he says, “Never say yes to work you are not sure about being able to do successfully; never depend on someone else to take responsibility for your career; try to do your best by yourself; never find excuses for failure, it will just make you feel better temporarily; do not hesitate to apologise when you are wrong; focus on 1 main area of interest; and never make quick or sharp decisions you will regret the next day. Finally, an academic career is not easy, but do not complain about the difficulties. Be prepared to accept them as a reality from the beginning.”

References

1. Vos MA, Gorenek B, Verduyn SC, van der Hulst FF, Leunissen JD, Dohmen L, Wellens HJ. Observations on the onset of torsade de pointes arrhythmias in the acquired long QT syndrome. *Cardiovasc Res*. 2000;48:421–429.
2. Aritmiler; Nedenleri, Güncel Tanı ve Tedavi Yöntemleri. Bülent Görenek, ed. Istanbul: Nobel Tıp Kitapevleri Ltd. ti; 2010.
3. Gorenek B, Kudaiberdieva G, Birdane A, Cavusoglu Y, Goktekin O, Unalir A, Ata N, Timuralp B. Importance of initiation pattern of poly-morphic ventricular tachycardia in patients with implantable cardioverter defibrillators. *Pacing Clin Electrophysiol*. 2006;29:48–52.
4. Gorenek B, Parspur A, Timuralp B, Birdane A, Ata N, Cavusoglu Y, Unalir A. Atrial fibrillation after percutaneous coronary intervention: predictive importance of clinical, angiographic features and P-wave dispersion. *Cardiology*. 2007;107:203–208
5. Gorenek B, Kudaiberdieva G, Goktekin O, Cavusoglu Y, Birdane A, Unalir A, Ata N, Timuralp B. Long-short sequence may predict immediate recurrence of atrial fibrillation after external cardioversion. *Europace*. 2003;5:11–16.

Contact details for Professor Görenek: Eski ehir Osmangazi University, Cardiology Department, Eski ehir, Turkey. Tel: +905424312483; fax: +902222292266; E-mail: bulent@gorenek.com

Judy Özkan is a freelance medical journalist.