Online Courses: Overcoming the Limitations in Psychiatry Training

Provided that they can connect to internet, psychiatrists and psychiatry residents all over the country are provided with access to online courses on a wide range of topics covering core psychiatry curriculum. This service does not differ according to their institution, position, location, and it is free of charge. The soul requirement is being a member of the Psychiatric Association of Turkey (PAT). Furthermore, the instructors of the courses, well-known experts in their field, contribute voluntarily. Now, PAT’s Committee on Formal and Non-Formal Education is exploring ways to enrich the content and facilitate the access to the courses.

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Since 2012, the members of the Psychiatric Association of Turkey (PAT) have unlimited access to online courses on the Association’s website. The preparations for these courses presented under the title ‘Open Education Program’ has a longer history. There are many reasons behind the project of organizing an online educational psychiatry program in Turkey. One of the most important and influential reason was inequalities in education and training opportunities among different institutions throughout Turkey. Psychiatric Association of Turkey tried to put an effort for psychiatry residents and psychiatrists working in various parts of Turkey with diverse working conditions and unequal educational opportunities.

Before the introduction of the Program, PAT’s Committee on Formal and Non-Formal Education developed a major plan based on the core curriculum of psychiatry training in Turkey. The core curriculum of PAT, which was based on the recommendations of WPA and other national psychiatry associations modified according to local needs, was earlier prepared and published by the Board. The courses were targeting the provision of the minimum required content for psychiatry residents, but also they were meant to serve as sources of continuing education for practicing psychiatrists.

Modules were planned by the relevant Sections of the PAT, where each topic was presented for 20-30 minutes video by a volunteering expert of the field. Members can simultaneously follow the video recording of the instructors and visual power point presentations prepared by them. Each course includes pre- and post-tests which provide feedback to the member on their progress in the course. In addition, a list of further reading is provided in the end of each course. Continuing Medical Education credits (Turkish Medical Association) are provided with the completion of each module.

Modules have been consecutively placed to the website as soon as they were ready. Following the launch of the initial courses, continuing feedback obtained
from the members and instructors, as well as the evolving need in the field of psychiatry, were taken into consideration by the Committee in the priority and planning of new modules. For example, a module on military psychiatry was prepared with the increased need for training following the transfer of the control of military hospitals to Health Ministry in 2016. And more recently, a module on the mental health services for refugees is under preparation. Currently a total of 152 courses, in 17 modules are accessible on the website.

By the first quarter of 2018, in total, the online courses were followed almost thirteen thousand times. This rate is higher than those of similar programs executed by other medical specialties in Turkey. Yearly analysis of the rates suggests an increasing awareness and use by the members. Last year, the module on military psychiatry had the highest rate of being watched among all available modules. This finding strengthens the benefits of using feedbacks and responding to changing needs in planning an education program.

Time does not bring change only in the needs for information, but also the means through which people choose to reach information sources. In recent years, access to internet has increasingly shifted to mobile phones and tablets, rather than desktops. Therefore, Committee on Formal and Non-Formal Education is lately busy with a project aiming to provide access to the courses through mobile technology. Providing access through mobile phones is expected to raise interest in the online courses, especially among the residents. Furthermore, in addition to lectures provided by an instructor, the preparation of short video captures of psychiatric interviews and examinations related to specific patient groups or conditions continues. With voluntary contribution from its members, the Psychiatric Association of Turkey (PAT) insists on exploring means of facilitating qualified psychiatry training, both during the residency and afterwards, and overcoming the physical and temporal limitations in meeting with experts in diverse areas of interest in psychiatry.