



## Raising awareness about meningitis, Turkey

Turkey Meningitis Information Centre is working with students and volunteer advocates to raise awareness about meningitis in Turkey.

Mehmet Gencil became involved with meningitis after hearing about a friend's daughter who had contracted the disease. He hadn't known that meningitis can kill in 24 hours if left untreated; or the signs and symptoms to look out for. As a parent himself he wanted to keep his children safe and to alert other families to the dangers of the disease.

For the first few years the organisation was not very active, although it was part of the Confederation of Meningitis Organisations (CoMO) network. Then Mehmet reached out to university students to help spread the message. "I had one contact in the university, but they had friends and other contacts, and we quickly became a network," says Mehmet.

Students are great campaigners. They're young and have energy and ideas; and they're experts in social media which helps! Lots of them are studying medicine or law and are very motivated to make a difference."

The organisation started to work with students in 2020, just as COVID took off, but they did not let the pandemic stop their campaigning. They met virtually to plan activities; and most of their awareness raising has been done through social media. "It helped that people were at home all day," explains Mehmet. "They had time on their hands and were looking for health information, so we helped fill that gap."

Since then, the group have hosted a podcast featuring medical experts and

### Organisation:

Turkey Meningitis  
Information Centre

### Location:

Turkey

### Background:

Volunteer-led organisation  
with no paid staff

### Contact:

Mehmet Gencil

### Change objective:

To raise awareness about meningitis



parents with experience of meningitis, promoting it on Instagram and attracting numerous followers. This has enabled them to help counter vaccine hesitancy which is a growing trend in Turkey. "We've had medics and scientists giving the facts, so it helps build confidence in vaccines," says Mehmet.

The group has also organised numerous other activities. For World Meningitis Day they developed an awareness campaign about signs and symptoms which was covered in local media and in other forums. And they have also developed a painting book – with 2000 copies delivered free to schools – which invites children to colour in cartoons and promotes the message that 'a world without meningitis is possible'.

## Results and impact

- A webinar with meningitis experts, including sessions on the evolution of meningitis vaccines, meningitis diagnosis and management, meningitis facts and symptoms
- Two radio features, talking about meningitis facts and symptoms
- A feature in a national newspaper
- A live broadcast from Ege University Medical Faculty
- A live broadcast on Instagram, with two videos released on YouTube and watched 13,000 times.

*"Campaigning is hard and it's important to refresh your motivation. When I hear of someone who has survived without impairment, or someone comes to us to find information and will be able to deal with the disease if it strikes... that makes it all worthwhile."*

Mehmet Gencil

## Key learning

- **Do things virtually.** Campaigns can be organised virtually, which makes it easier to involve those at a distance or who find it difficult to meet up.
- **Refresh your motivation.** It's important to take breaks and come back refreshed from time to time. Look at what you are achieving, and this will help you keep going.

## Further resources:

[Turkey Meningitis Information Centre website](https://www.meningitis.org)

## Advocacy tip

### Work with young people.

Working with students or other young people is a great way to boost your campaigning capacity. Young people have fresh ideas, and understand the social media world, so get them involved if you can.

## Contact details:

Meningitis Research Foundation  
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