

Memories from the EAHIL 2026 Conference in Antalya: Building bridges together



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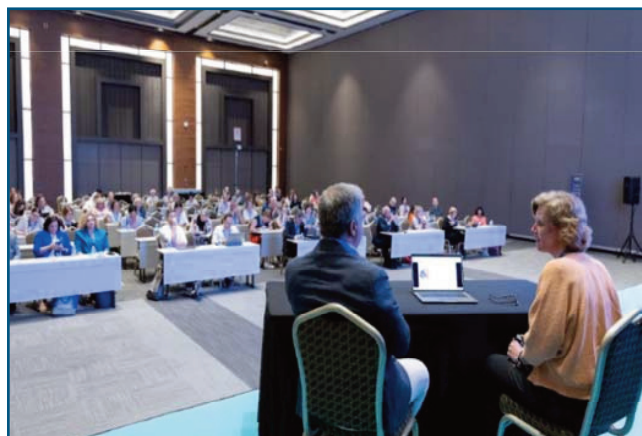
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Hosting an EAHIL event in Türkiye for the third time in 15 years was a great source of pride for us. For nearly a year and a half, preparations for EAHIL 2026 became part of our daily lives, with countless emails, meetings, programme discussions, sponsor arrangements, and practical details. Then suddenly June arrived, and the names we had seen for months in emails and participant lists became real faces in Antalya.

Looking back, what remains most strongly is not the workload, but the people, conversations, friendships, and the sense that, for a few special days on the Mediterranean coast, we created a unique EAHIL community together.

FROM BOSTON TO ANTALYA: A CONFERENCE DREAM REALISED

In 2013, as a Cunningham Fellow, I attended a huge Medical Library Association (MLA) Conference in Boston and was impressed by the conference hotel model, where participants could attend scientific sessions, meet colleagues, and socialise in the same setting. Since then, the idea of one day hosting an international professional meeting in a similar environment had remained with me. When we decided to host EAHIL 2026 in Antalya, this model seemed particularly appropriate. Antalya is not only one of Türkiye's leading tourism destinations, but also an established congress city. Holding the conference at Rixos Sungate in Beldibi allowed us to bring together the scientific and social dimensions of the meeting in one place. From 8 to 12 June 2026, a long-held idea finally became reality.



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The LOC and IPC chose as the conference themes to reflect the rapid transformation of our profession, artificial intelligence, digital health, evidence synthesis, open science, new research infrastructures, and changing user expectations are reshaping both libraries and the roles of health information professionals.

For us, however, “bridges” meant more than technological change. They also represented connections between people, countries, professions, disciplines, and generations. EAHIL itself is one such bridge, bringing together colleagues from different institutional and cultural backgrounds to share knowledge, experience, and ideas.

Antalya was a natural setting for this theme. Türkiye has long been a geographical and cultural bridge between different civilisations, while Antalya brings together history, nature, and the Mediterranean. We wanted our colleagues not only

to attend a conference, but also to experience Türkiye, its hospitality, cuisine, culture, and landscape as part of EAHIL 2026.

A CONFERENCE UNDER ONE ROOF

As I mentioned earlier, the “conference and accommodation under one roof” model that had impressed me at MLA meetings seemed particularly well suited to Antalya. Antalya is not only one of Türkiye’s leading tourism destinations, but also a major congress city that regularly hosts large national and international events. Rixos Sungate, the accommodation hotel of Antalya Bilim University, offered us an ideal setting in which to bring this idea to life.

One of the most important decisions we made during the organisation process was to hold both the conference and the accommodation at the same venue, Rixos Sungate. In this way, we had the opportunity to bring to EAHIL the conference model I had experienced at MLA meetings, while also making Antalya’s identity as a tourism and congress destination part of the overall conference experience.



Located between the Mediterranean Sea and the mountains, the venue allowed participants to stay, meet, learn, and socialise in the same environment. This arrangement helped create the atmosphere we had envisioned from the very beginning. Conversations did not end when the sessions were over; they continued during coffee breaks, over lunch, in the exhibition area, and into the evening. Speakers who met during a session were able to continue exchanging ideas afterwards, while first-time EAHIL 2026 participants had many opportunities to meet and engage with more experienced members.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION, AND THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE MEDICAL LIBRARIAN

EAHIL 2026's scientific programme was designed to ensure that the conference theme was reflected not only in its title, but throughout the programme itself. Across two days, 10 scientific sessions, 5 workshops, keynote presentations, and sponsor sessions addressed a wide range of topics, including artificial intelligence, evidence synthesis, systematic reviews, research support, health literacy, research data management, open access, and the changing professional roles of health librarians.

At the opening ceremony, EAHIL President Francesca Gualtieri, Chair of the Local Organising Committee (LOC) Güssün Güneş, and Chair of the International Programme Committee (IPC) Hamza Kandur welcomed the participants and highlighted the theme of EAHIL 2026, the preparation process, and the importance of the conference in fostering professional collaboration. This was followed by Dr Muhammet Şimşek's "The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Forensic Medicine: The Turkish Experience" and Prof. Dr Nevzat Özel's "From Library to TrustOps: Operating the Trust Layer for Clinical AI & Evidence", which explored artificial intelligence, trusted information, and transformation in healthcare from different perspectives.

One of the most striking aspects of the programme was the way it brought together traditional librarianship topics and the information services of the future. From hospital librarianship and health literacy to AI-



supported evidence synthesis, large language models, and emerging information retrieval tools, this diversity became one of the clearest expressions of the "Bridges to new horizons" theme within the scientific programme.

Sponsor presentations by Wolters Kluwer Health, Elsevier, EBSCO, Oxford University Press, AMBOSS, Taylor&Francis, Primal Pictures, Rayyan, MDPI, Bentham Science and TDNet added another dimension by introducing new products, platforms, and AI-supported information services relevant to the health information field.

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The workshops, meanwhile, offered participants opportunities not only to listen, but also to think, discuss, and practise together. Taken as a whole, the programme reminded us once again that the role of the health librarian is expanding rapidly. Librarians are no longer only professionals who provide access to information; they are increasingly becoming research partners, educators, evidence specialists, and trusted guides in navigating reliable information.

TOGETHER BY THE MEDITERRANEAN

One of the most enjoyable parts of EAHIL 2026 was welcoming colleagues who were attending EAHIL for the first time. The First Timers Welcome Reception, held on Tuesday evening at Rixos Sungate, brought together first-time attendees, members of the EAHIL Board, and the EAHIL 2026 Local Organising Committee.

Joining an international professional community for the first time can feel daunting, but EAHIL's openness and inclusiveness quickly help newcomers feel part of the community. With Turkish, Arabic, and English music, conversation, and dancing, the evening offered a warm introduction to EAHIL and to the Mediterranean atmosphere of Antalya.

Suggestions from EAHIL colleagues also helped shape the social programme. After seeing Antalya's wild horses in the conference promotional video, our American colleague Kristine suggested organising a viewing excursion. Her idea encouraged us to present Antalya not only through its sea and history, but also through its natural environment. We remained in contact with local villagers until the last moment to follow the horses' movements and organise the visit. Although the small group that joined the excursion did not see as many horses as hoped, the participants enjoyed meeting local people, spending time together, and experiencing a different side of Antalya.

We also wanted participants to experience the warmth and hospitality of Türkiye beyond the scientific programme. The Welcome Reception, held in the sponsor and exhibition area after the first full conference day, created an informal setting for participants and sponsors to meet and continue their conversations.

The Gala Dinner brought everyone together again in a more festive atmosphere. At the Seafood Restaurant, participants enjoyed Turkish and Greek music, dancing, and the tradition of writing wishes on plates before breaking them. We also sang Turkish songs together, and the evening continued with performances and dancing nearby.

These informal moments are an important part of any EAHIL meeting. Years later, we may



remember an excellent presentation or a useful workshop, but we also remember the person we met over breakfast, a conversation that continued after a session, the laughter at the Gala Dinner, and friendships that began unexpectedly. Antalya gave us many such memories.

THE TEAM BEHIND EAHIL 2026

No conference belongs to a single organiser. It is the result of many people, often unseen by participants, working together on a wide range of tasks towards a shared goal. As Chair of the Local Organising Committee, I feel very fortunate to have worked with colleagues who generously shared their time, experience, and energy throughout the process.

The International Programme Committee, chaired by Prof. Dr Hamza Kandur, brought together colleagues from Türkiye and many other countries and made a major contribution to shaping the scientific programme. The EAHIL Board and our valued colleagues across the EAHIL community supported us throughout the process with their experience, guidance, and encouragement. Our sponsors and exhibitors were also important partners in making the conference possible and contributed to the professional exchange throughout the meeting.

For this reason, the EAHIL Board's decision at the closing session to donate trees to the EAHIL Forest in Sivas on behalf of all LOC members was an especially meaningful and emotional gesture for us. Knowing that the many months of work behind EAHIL 2026 would be remembered through trees leaving a lasting mark in nature became one of the most special memories of the conference.

WHEN THE BRIDGE WAS FINALLY BUILT

"Bridges to new horizons" began as simply the theme of a conference. By the time we reached the closing session, however, we realised how quickly the week had passed; the days seemed to have flown by. At that moment, I felt that together we had truly experienced what those words meant.

During those days in Antalya, bridges were built between experienced professionals and first-time attendees, librarians and researchers, Türkiye and other countries, established professional practices and emerging technologies, and perhaps most importantly, between people.

When the final session ended and participants began leaving Rixos Sungate, those of us who had spent months organising the conference naturally felt a great sense of relief. At the same time, there was also a sense of sadness that something we had worked on for so long had suddenly come to an end.

Fortunately, EAHIL conferences do not really end when we say goodbye: the conversations continue, the collaborations continue, the friendships continue.

And every EAHIL meeting carries something forward to the next.

It was a great privilege for us to host the EAHIL community in Türkiye. We came to Antalya hoping to build bridges to new horizons. Looking back now, I believe we truly built those bridges together.