

History of Pharmacy in Algeria

Introduction :

The history of pharmacy in Algeria is particularly rich, spanning several great civilizations: the ancient Berber period, the Islamic conquest, the Ottoman period, French colonization, and finally the post-independence era. Understanding this evolution is indispensable for any Algerian pharmacist who wishes to grasp the foundations of their profession.

1. The Arab Period:

From the Islamization of the Maghreb, Algeria became part of the Arab-Islamic scientific sphere. This period is characterized by an intense circulation of medical and pharmaceutical knowledge between the East, Andalusia, and the Maghreb.

2. The Ottoman Period:

The Ottoman period in Algeria extended broadly from the 16th century until 1830. It does not represent a complete break with the previous era, but rather a continuity enriched by new Mediterranean exchanges. Commercial networks linking the Maghreb to the East and Europe facilitated the arrival of new substances.

Ibn Hamadouche, an Algerian pharmacologist from 18th-century Algiers (Ottoman period), authored *Kechf Erroumouz*, the first known Algerian pharmacological treatise, synthesizing the medical and phytotherapeutic knowledge of his time.

3. The Colonial Period (1830–1962) :

French colonization, beginning in 1830, brought about a profound transformation of health structures in Algeria. It progressively introduced an administrative, hospital, university, and regulatory framework inspired by France.

The period 1830–1962 was marked by:

- The establishment of pharmacists trained according to the French model.
- The development of pharmacies (officines) in major cities.
- The introduction of professional and administrative rules.
- The progressive integration of pharmacy into the colonial hospital and university system.

Colonial pharmacy contributed to the technical modernization of certain practices, but it was part of an unequal system. Local knowledge was often marginalized in favour of the colonial biomedical model.

4. After Independence:

With independence, the *Pieds-Noirs* returned to France and many pharmacists abandoned their practices. At the time of independence, there were only 70 Algerian pharmacists. Committed to a socialist path, the new government progressively nationalized the distribution and manufacturing of pharmaceutical products.

In 1963, the Algerian Central Pharmacy (PCA) was created, obtaining the monopoly on the import and wholesale distribution of pharmaceutical products.

In 1970, the Pharmed and Biotic laboratories were nationalized.

In 1982, the production branch of the PCA was established as the National Pharmaceutical Production Enterprise. In 1985, it was renamed SAIDAL, the first pharmaceutical laboratory producing generic medicines in Algeria.

In the early 1990s, the monopoly on the import and production of medicines was lifted. In 1997, SAIDAL was transformed into an industrial group incorporating Biotic, Pharmal, and Antibiotic. Today, the Algerian pharmaceutical sector is organized around the Ministry of Pharmaceutical Industry (created in 2020), the SAIDAL Group, the Pasteur Institute of Algeria, and a growing network of private manufacturers and wholesalers. Algeria aims for national coverage with generic medicines and greater therapeutic independence.

5. History of Pharmacy Education in Algeria:

Pharmaceutical education in Algeria has gone through several stages, linked to political, colonial, and then national contexts.

5.1 During the Colonial Period

Higher medical and pharmaceutical education developed within the colonial framework, particularly in Algiers. It was initially designed to meet the needs of the administration and the European population. Algerian access to these programmes remained limited for a long time.

5.2 After Independence

After 1962, the democratization of higher education became a central objective. The Algerian state encouraged the training of health professionals, including pharmacists. University programmes were progressively strengthened and pharmacy education consolidated, with an increase in the number of students, teaching staff, and training structures.

Algeria currently has fourteen pharmacy training structures (one autonomous faculty + 13 university departments). The Faculty of Pharmacy of Algiers is the first and only autonomous pharmacy faculty in the country, with two departments: classical pharmacy and industrial pharmacy.

Pharmacy departments within faculties of medicine are located in: Oran, Constantine, Annaba, Tlemcen, Sidi Bel-Abbès, Blida, Tizi-Ouzou, Sétif, Batna, Mostaganem, Béchar, Béjaïa, and Ouargla.

Training lasts 6 years in all structures, leading to the degree of Doctor of Pharmacy.

6. Key Figures in the History of Pharmacy in Algeria:

• The First Algerian Pharmacists

Among the pioneers, Mohammed Khaznadar enrolled in 1893 at the School of Medicine and Pharmacy in Algiers. He became the third pharmacist of Muslim origin to obtain a diploma in Algeria, after Abdallah Ben Mohammed and Boumediene Ben Hafiz. In 1897, he opened his first pharmacy in Sidi Bel-Abbès, marking a significant milestone in the history of Algerian pharmacy.

• Pharmacists of the Revolution

Among the pharmacists who played a major role in the national movement are: Ferhat Abbas, Benyoucef Benkhedda, Mohamed Ali Pacha, and Hafsa Bisker, a pharmacy student committed to the revolution.

- Ferhat Abbas (1899–1985)

Born in Taher (Wilaya of Jijel). Holder of a pharmacy diploma, he practised as a pharmacist in Sétif before becoming one of the greatest figures of Algerian nationalism. He served as:

- Delegate to the Algerian Assembly
- 1st President of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA)
- President of the first Constituent Assembly of independent Algeria in September 1962

The University of Sétif bears his name.

- **Benyoucef Benkhedda (1920–2003)**

Born in Berrouaghia (Wilaya of Médéa). After graduating, he set up as a pharmacist in Blida.

He served as President of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) from August 1961 to August 1962. The University of Algiers 1 bears his name.

- **Lakhdar Besseghir (1924–1958)**

Born on 29 August 1924 in Riat el Hammar (Tlemcen). After his studies, he obtained his pharmacy diploma in 1956. He became very actively engaged in the Algerian revolution within the FLN, notably in Wilaya V. Arrested by the French authorities, he was tortured and assassinated in 1958.

He is one of the pharmacist martyrs of the revolution, alongside Saad Rahal, Alloua Abbas, and Bachir Bennaceur, a pharmacy student. His memory is honoured in Tlemcen, where a secondary school bears his name: Besseghir Lakhdar secondary school.

Conclusion :

The history of pharmacy in Algeria shows that contemporary Algerian pharmacy is the result of multiple contributions: local traditions, ancient scholarly heritage, colonial influence, national construction, and university modernization.