

Obituary

Yucel Kanpolat, MD (1941–2016)



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Professor Kanpolat, one of the most prominent neurosurgeons in the field of pain surgery, passed away on September 17th, 2016.

Dr. Kanpolat was born in 1941 in Sivas, Turkey. He graduated from Gazi High School, Ankara in 1959. He then attended Ankara University, School of Medicine, and obtained his medical degree in 1965. He worked as a practitioner during his public health service between 1965 and 1968 in Diyarbakir, where he won the World Health Organization's (WHO) "Best Public Health Service Unit Award" with his colleagues in 1966. He became a resident assistant at the Department of Neurosurgery, Ankara University during 1968–1973. The next year, Dr. Kanpolat served as the chief of Haydarpasa Military Hospital's Neurosurgical Department during his military service between 1974 and 1975 in Istanbul.

Dr. Kanpolat became an assistant professor at the Department of Neurosurgery, Ankara University in 1975. He subsequently got promoted to associate professor and professor at the same institute in 1978 and 1988, respectively. He served as the chairman of the Neurosurgery Department, Ankara University between 1999 and 2008. Dr. Kanpolat trained more than 100 neurosurgical residents until his retirement in 2008. He was elected and appointed as the president of the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TUBA) following his retirement from Ankara University, where he served until 2012. Moreover, he became the charter member of the Turkish

Neurosurgical Society in 1985 and served as the president of the society twice, first in 1990–1991 and then in 1995–1996. Furthermore, Dr. Kanpolat received the Paxton International Professorship from Oregon Health Sciences University (USA) in 2006.

He practiced CT-guided stereotactic pain surgery for the first time worldwide in 1986. He undertook numerous academic studies in stereotactic and functional neurosurgery. Dr. Kanpolat made several presentations in international congresses, while he made publications in neurosurgical journals. He was invited as a key speaker to many national and international congresses to give lectures. On every occasion and manner, Dr. Kanpolat trained numerous neurosurgeons from Turkey and abroad throughout his career. Those instances include the Kanpolat Cordotomy Kit (KCTE), which was produced in Burlington, Boston USA in 1994, as well as, a total of 176 international publications referred in Index Medicus (1869 citations as of 13.11.2015), 92 globally invited lectures, and 48 presentations in international congresses.

Dr. Kanpolat had memberships, presidencies, and chairmanships in many neurosurgical communities. He was an active and emblematic member of various international societies such as European Association of Neurosurgical Societies (EANS) and European Society for Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery (ESSFN). He served as both officer and executive member in all of them. Dr. Kanpolat organized ESSFN-Congress in Antalya in 1994.

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His legacy as a continuous contributor to scientific education has been remarkable, especially during his presidency in the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TUBA). Dr. Kanpolat has endeavored to practice “La main à la pâte” in pilot schools. The objective of this TUBA program was to promote the education of science among children in Turkey via game playing. Dr. Kanpolat collaborated with valuable teachers during this project. He arranged the training of 20 teachers from Turkey in Paris, France whereas Georges Charpak, Nobel laureate for Physics in 1992, Pierre Léna, and Yves Quéré took part in this project in Turkey as important contributors. During the presidency of Prof. Kanpolat in TUBA, Open Courseware Project was continued. Commenced in 2007, 80 lectures on Basic Sciences and Social Sciences were put together within this framework under Dr. Kanpolat’s presidency between 2010 and 2011. Dr. Kanpolat also contributed on humanitarian issues where the need was most dire. He and two members of TUBA went to Afghanistan in 2004 on a voluntary project. There they observed the most pressing humanitarian problems, and prepared a report which the visiting team published it on Surgical Neurology with the title “Is there a common consciousness of humanity? Should there be one?”

Apart from numerous academic conferences, he gave so many lectures on lives and disciplines of Marie Curie, Louis Pasteur, Ramon Cajal, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, etc., in many cities and countries. He also gave a Marie Curie lecture entitled “A Woman of Wisdom in the Science Age-Maria Skłodowska Curie,” in the Pomeranian Academy of Medicine, Department of Neurosurgery, on May 9th of 2003, in

Szczecin, Poland. He advised young neurosurgeons, neurosurgeons, and other audiences to listen, write, read, ask, and work hard in all his conferences, lessons, and presentations.

Dr. Kanpolat and his work, especially in the surgical treatment of pain, inspired many neurosurgeons all over the world. He grandly supported a course in therapeutic action which ultimately benefited his patients. As an influential neurosurgeon, he often organized regular local or international training courses, giving lectures, offered fellowship programs that he designed to realize his vision in the surgery and treatment of pain. Dr. Kanpolat did not ignore the social aspect of leadership either. He was always accessible to students, academicians, and visitors in a warm and hospitable manner. At all stages of his professional career, Dr. Kanpolat was a highly regarded neurosurgeon and a very productive tutor.

We will all hold in our memories forever his friendly and kind nature, his passion for knowledge, as well as scientific progression. We have witnessed the passing of a thoroughly outstanding neurosurgeon, academician, mentor, and friend, who contributed a lot to the neurosurgical societies, neurosurgeons, and neurosurgery. He will be missed by many people for a lot of reasons. It is my distinct honor to recollect him in an obituary in an issue of the Surgical Neurology International.

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In memory of Yücel Kanpolat

IN MEMORY OF YÜCEL KANPOLAT, MD

Professor Kanpolat was born in Sivas, an eastern city of Turkey in 1941 during World War II. Sivas is the city Mustafa Kemal Atatürk laid the groundwork of a new modern government from the ashes of Ottoman Empire and found the Turkish Republic.

Professor Kanpolat graduated from medical school in 1965 and received his diploma from İsmet İnönü, the second president of Turkish republic and brothers of arm of Atatürk.

Yücel Kanpolat, just as he had a role in building modern Turkey, also had a role in building modern neurosurgery. He was one of the pioneers in founding of modern Turkish neurosurgery, following early neurosurgeons and became exemplary to younger generations with his innovative, leading, and educational mentorship. He successfully represented Turkish neurosurgery in international platform.

His talks not only on pain surgery but also on philosophy of science and history of science inspired young scientists.

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Yücel Kanpolat was not only a fine neurosurgeon, he was, above all, to me a fine human being. I was privileged to have him as a friend. We had many discussions about the

world beyond neurosurgery and the state of humanity. He was an in-depth thinker, a sensitive man with a kind soul, a good man, a man who was loyal to his country, a man who was a huge supporter of Turkish Neurosurgery with many other great leaders of the Turkish Neurosurgical Society, and a scientist who wanted to improve the research coming from Turkey, which he did in his position with the government. To me Yücel Kanpolat was a person who was an excellent role model for all people. I have lost a friend whom I admired deeply, and so has the world.

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With rapid advancement of medical technology, innovation in neurosurgery comes now at a constantly accelerating rate, and every technological breakthrough soon becomes eclipsed by a more sophisticated application of scientific and technical progress. And still, there is always a room for some ingenious innovation that withstands the test of time and outlives its inventor.

This is definitely true of the talented Turkish neurosurgeon whose recent passing saddened the entire worldwide

neurosurgical community – Prof. Yücel Kanpolat will be remembered by generations of neurosurgeons for his dedication and lifelong spirit of innovation.

His dedication was to his patients, and the patients he chose to treat were those with intractable pain. His innovation was to make surgical interventions more focused and more precise, perhaps the most notable contribution of Dr. Kanpolat to the modern neurosurgery of pain was to use CT-guidance in spinal cord lesioning approaches, such as cervical cordotomy, midline myelotomy and trigeminal tractotomy/nucleotomy.

I read his articles when I was in training in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s; I listened to his presentations at national and international meetings when I was doing my residency and fellowship in the US in 1990s; finally, I went to observe his work in Ankara in the spring of year 2000, which was a unique opportunity to learn pioneering procedures directly from the legendary person who invented them. Ever since that time, I started using his approaches in my practice in Chicago, and on countless occasions I felt the gratitude of patients whose pain was

relieved after undergoing “Kanpolat procedures” – simple, straightforward, accurate, and effective interventions.

Much has been – and will be – written about the human qualities of late Prof. Kanpolat; after all, he was a true gentleman and renaissance man, erudite and connoisseur of art, academician, mentor, and colleague. But in my mind he will forever remain an example – a perfect role model – of

what I always imagined a doctor should be – selfless and fully dedicated to his patients and their well-being.

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With the recent passing of Yucel Kanpolat, the neurosurgery community lost a pillar of science and clinical practice; a pioneer in the field of Functional Neurosurgery. Yucel was a dear friend to many in our field, and was an international figure, linking Turkey to almost every country in the world. Neurosurgery has lost a very special surgeon, scientist, and humanitarian.

His influence in functional and stereotactic Neurosurgery, particularly pain surgery, is renowned and will be lasting. He changed our thinking with regard to minimally invasive destructive procedures for pain through his thorough knowledge of anatomy and physiology. He invented minimally invasive image-guided ablative pain surgery – anterolateral cordotomy for somatic pain, trigeminal tractotomy/nucleotomy for facial pain. Many of us owe him a great debt for his teaching and clinical insights.

Dr. Kanpolat spent his entire neurosurgical career at Ankara University, where he first completed his residency from 1968–1973, whereupon he entered his academic practice in 1975, ascending to Professor in 1989. I first met him almost 30 years ago at an Istanbul Congress, and was immediately taken by his energy, curiosity, and broad interests in science and medicine. In 1998, I was honored to join him in at the University of Ankara as the Nurham Avman Lecturer, and had a chance to observe him in his practice, in the academic setting. He was clearly a master technician, but more importantly, he treated each patient in a kind and direct manner, devoid of ostentation.

His scholarly achievement is notable, through 176 international publications, 92 invited lectures,

48 presentations in international congresses, and multiple visiting professorships and named lectures worldwide. Other notable professional highlights included his service as President of the Turkish Neurosurgery Society from 1995–1996 and President of the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TUBA) 2008–2012. He was Executive member of the WFNS, ENS, WFFSN, EANS, and a valued member of many journal editorial boards.

He was the recipient of many awards including the Science Award of Ankara University, the Turkish Neurosurgery Society Excellence Service Award (2006), the OHSU Paxton International Professorship (2006), and the Popular Bilim Medical Science Prize, (2006).

He had a profound interest in history and archeology, and was an avid student of the origins of ancient civilizations, many of which were founded in Turkey. I had the opportunity to visit many historic sites with him in Turkey. These sites included several trips to Ephesus, Aspendos, Perge, Bursa, Iznik, Aphrodisias, and a special TUBA project, the Suleymaniye Mosque madrasa. This travelogue simply serves to highlight what was a passion for Yucel.

Yucel leaves behind an American family that loved him very much. He was like a brother to me, and an uncle to our children. We will miss him very much, and we will never forget him.

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