



## **Get to Know ... Mehmet Zileli**

*Dr Mehmet Zileli is well known to the EANS and international neurosurgical communities as a spinal neurosurgeon who has made important contributions to the education and training of spinal neurosurgery in Turkey and internationally. Please see the end of this interview for a more complete biography.*

~ What is your best holiday option?

***In fact, I have not used my holiday allowance for many years. Since I am travelling too much for medical meetings, I try to spare one or two days for sightseeing. Travelling is the most effective way of learning other cultures. The best type of holiday for my family and I are boat trips in South West Turkey, the so-called "blue-voyage". A trip of 5-7 days is a real relaxation.***

~If you wanted to meet one person – dead or alive – who and why?

***I would love to have met Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Even now, we can learn what leadership is from his example. His prognostications for the future have all become reality.***

~Most overused phrase?

***"I used to do it..."***

***Besides that, I like using quotations to explain something such as, "Life's tragedy is that we get old too soon and wise too late". Probably the longest learning period after birth among mammals is that of humans. Human babies cannot walk and talk before 10-15 months. Wisdom is something to be gained after many years with some mistakes. The same is true for experience in surgery.***

~List your favorites – pick a few from: book, movie or play, quote, poem, website, city, type of food or individual dish, music genre, song, band or individual musician, board game ***I like listening to music. I enjoy listening to classic music, especially during surgery. I also believe that in order to learn about other cultures, their music should also be learnt. During my frequent visits for conferences I try to buy music CD s of the country I am visiting.***

~Where did you grow up?

***I grew up in Izmir. It is on the west coast of Turkey with a Mediterranean climate and habits. As in other Mediterranean countries, the people here are more tolerant, enjoying times for fun, probably somewhat less hard-working, but quite honest.***

***During my childhood, neighbours were like a part of the family, the children spent time on the streets, playing or creating games with other kids. Recent changes have put an end to something of this, which I believe is disadvantageous to our adaption to life.***

~Neurosurgical inspiration?

**Working in neurosurgery is like searching for the unknown. It is not just about continuous learning, one also must constantly improve one's skills and talents. The number of areas in which our society wishes a neurosurgeon to have expertise are many – to be a good physician (having communication skills with patients), a good surgeon (having practical talents and patience), a good scientist (extensive knowledge in neuroscience), and a good teacher (teaching and presentation abilities for trainees and patients). To be successful in all of these you need to work throughout your whole life.**

~Your best / worst / most embarrassing moment as a neurosurgeon

**I guess most surgeons feel bad if a surgery does not end as they expected. This is quite interesting: we are more preoccupied with our failures than our successes. An experienced surgeon is the surgeon who has made many mistakes.**

~Who is your mentor? **First I must mention Professor Erdem Tunçbay, who was a pioneer for developing the neurosurgical subspecialties in Turkey. I was the one dedicated to spine surgery under his leadership. I must also mention two great persons as my mentors: Professor Johannes Schramm from Germany, and Professor Edward C Benzel from the USA.**

~If you hadn't been a neurosurgeon ...? **I would have been an artist or would have studied history of art. In fact, I am an amateur artist. I paint using water colours and oil pastels. Painting makes me quite happy and I always tell myself I could have improved my talents in painting. [Please see the end of this piece for some of Mehmet Zileli's paintings.]**

~What is important in neurosurgical training? **I think we must teach our residents and fellows more than the techniques of surgery. This is somewhat far from the facts. Especially in spine surgery, patient selection is more important than surgical techniques and films of the patient. Most of the mistakes in spine surgery are due to improper patient selection. We can say that patient selection is more difficult in spine surgery than craniocerebral surgery. I believe residents must attend clinics together with senior surgeons. Another important point in training is the necessity of using imitational techniques. One good example is learning endoscopic techniques. Cadaver dissections must also be used widely to facilitate learning.**

~What is the future of spine surgery? **There is an increasing trend among neurosurgeons to get involved with spine surgery. This occurs more in countries where the number of neurosurgeons is increasing. It is a fact that spine surgery is a large part of neurosurgical practice. Another fact is that there is still some competition between ortho and neuro surgeons as to the share of spine patients.**

**Being an expert in spine surgery requires not only a knowledge of neurological sciences, but also of biomechanical concepts. The combination of basic training in both disciplines is necessary for spine training programs. For these reasons, improving spine fellowship programs is necessary for spine surgery education.**

***Due to the increasing numbers of aged people in the population, the incidence of degenerative spinal disorders is also increasing. I believe, spine surgery will have more attention in the future, and will evolve to a better level with advances in biology, mechanics and tissue engineering.***

***Short Biography:***

*Dr. Mehmet Zileli was born in 1956 and graduated from Ege Medical School in 1980 and became Professor of Neurosurgery in 1996. He served as the Chief of the Neurosurgery Department in Ege University, Izmir, Turkey between 2009-2011.*

*He has served as Founding President of Spine Section of Turkish Neurosurgical Society (1995-1999), President of the Turkish Neurosurgical Society (2006-2008), President, World Spinal Column Society (2010-2014), President of Middle East Spine Society (2011-2015), President of the Asia Pacific Cervical Spine Society (2014-2015)*

*Dr Mehmet Zileli has made important contributions to the education and training of spine surgeons in Turkey, by organizing numerous courses, and also hosted the "Travelling Fellowship of Spine Society of Europe" in 2002, 2003 and 2004. He is the founder of the first spine fellowship program in Turkey that served many national (35) and international (43) fellows.*

*He is the author or co-author of 147 scientific articles (70 international, 77 national, editor of 9 books, author of 24 international and 81 national book chapters, and has presented 426 papers or conferences in international meetings and 342 in national meetings. H index is 15. Number of citations is 734.*

*He is the member of 14 national and 20 international medical societies and is an editorial board member and/or reviewer for 35 scientific medical journals.*

