



DR. ÖMER ÇELİKER

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SUMMARY

Dr. Ömer Çeliker was one of the most important pioneers of Turkish Spinal Surgery, who made many significant achievements during his 42 years of life and was lost at an early age. While there had been wide usage of Harrington rods in Turkey, he was the first surgeon to use third generation spinal instrumentation systems in Turkey, and he popularized them during the late 1980s. He also educated many medical students and doctors who aspired towards the study of spinal surgery, in the clinic where he worked as a deputy section head.

Key Words: Ömer Çeliker, spinal surgery, Cotrel-Dubousset instrumentation

Level of Evidence: Biography, Level V

ÖZET

Op. Dr. Ömer Çeliker, 42 yıllık hayatına büyük başarılar sığdırmış, Türk omurga Cerrahisi'nin erken yaşta kaybettiğimiz önemli öncülerinden biridir. Yaygın şekilde Harrington rod kullanılan ülkemizde, seksenlerin sonunda tüm Dünyada kullanılmaya başlayan 3. kuşak omurga enstrümantasyon sistemlerini Türkiye'de ilk uygulayan ve popülerize olmasını sağlayan kişidir. Şef yardımcısı olarak çalıştığı klinikte, omurga cerrahisine gönül vermiş birçok öğrenci yetiştirmiş ve SSK Ankara Dışkapı Hastanesinin bu konuda isim yapmasına ön ayak olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ömer Çeliker, Omurga cerrahi, Cotrel – Dubousset enstrümantasyonu

Kanıt Düzeyi: Biyografi, Düzey V

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INTRODUCTION

One spring morning, we were working in a hectic state. A workshop was being held for the first time in the history of SSK Ankara Education Hospital, and we had a foreign guest from France. Moreover, this foreign guest was going to perform an operation in our hospital, and this operation would be broadcast live to the hall in which the meeting was held for the first time. In the afternoon, the guest would give a conference in the Türk-İş hall, and all the great instructors in Ankara were attending this meeting. The hall was crowded with journalists. The workshop topic was Cotrel-Dubousset instrumentation, which was being used for the first time in Turkey. We were supporting, because at the time we were still assistants. The leader of this workshop, who we all loved, was our clinic chief assistant, Dr. Ömer Çeliker (Figure-1).

Dr. Ömer Çeliker was the most creative and bravest specialist, who was the most open to innovation, in orthopedics and traumatology. His field of profession was basically "Pediatric Orthopedics"^{1-2,4}. His overseas publications were also in this field^{3,5}. He then began to make a name in the spine surgery field, in which he became interested later. He treated hundreds of patients successfully during his lifetime. He presented his spine surgery experiences at international and national conferences.

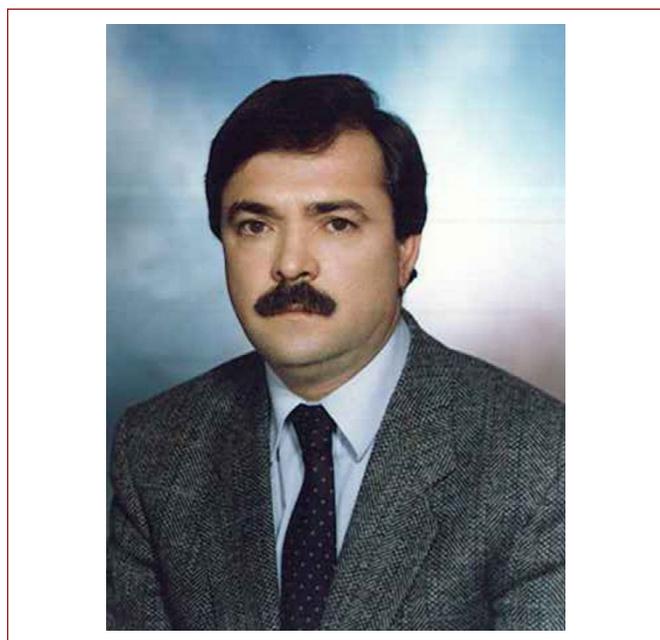


Figure-1. Dr. Ömer Çeliker

Three of his research papers were published in the first three volumes of this journal⁶⁻⁸. However, he was defeated by a relentless disease and died on 7 August 1991, during his most productive years.

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Ömer Çeliker was born as the second of seven children in 1949 in Dikenli village, Osmancık, Çorum. His father was a farmer. As for everyone in his village, his father did not register his birth until he went to town, months after his birth, and so his birthday was registered in January, the same as the birthdays of his brother two years older than him, his four sisters, and one brother younger than him. His father attended the elementary school and his mother was not literate. He attended the primary school in the village for his first three years. Then, for two years he went to another school, in a village three kilometers away, to finish primary school. He had to walk to this school, in winter and summer. When he arrived home after school, he finished his homework and helped his father with his remaining time. The family's income status was not good enough to meet the requirements for secondary school. At that time, no one in the village had gone to secondary school. However, his father was aware of his ambition to work and his intelligence, and so he was able to finish secondary school by staying with an acquaintance in Osmancık.

When he was 11 years old and at secondary school, his 14-year-old brother stepped on a rusty nail in the village. The wound became infected and treatment was delayed, and unfortunately his brother died due to a completely gangrenous leg in a short time. Dr. Ömer Çeliker was extremely influenced by this event. He made up his mind to be a doctor and to study hard, so that no one would die from a gangrenous leg.

One of his relatives assisted him in registering at Ankara Meteorology Vocational School, Etlük, Ankara, as he had the possibility to board there. When he started, he learned that it was not possible to go to medical school there, and so he registered for night classes at Ankara Atatürk High School. While he was attending both schools at the same time, he earned money carrying coal in a coal warehouse in Etlük. Dr. Ömer Çeliker graduated ranked first in his class from both the Meteorology Vocational

School and Atatürk High School. He was accepted at Kayseri Gevher Nesibe Medical School, Department of Medicine, Hacettepe University, because he was the highest ranked student.

In 1976, he graduated from Hacettepe Medical School. Then, he began his specialization in the Orthopedics and Traumatology department of the Education Hospital of the Medical School in Kayseri, the last step before he achieved his goal (Figure-2). In his first year there he married Dr. Silva Çeliker, who was his classmate and had started her specialization in ophthalmology in Kayseri, on 20 September 1977. Both became experts in 1980 (Figure-3).



Figure-2. Dr. Ömer Çeliker with his assistant friends in Kayseri.



Figure-3. Dr. Ömer Çeliker and his wife Dr. Silva Çeliker.

In 12 September 1980, while changes were happening in Turkey, he moved to Ankara and joined the army. He carried out his military service in the Military Hospital in Balıkesir.

In 1982, he began to work as a specialist in the First

Orthopedic and Traumatology clinic in SSK Ankara Dışkapı Education and Research Hospital (Figure-4).



Figure-4. First Orthopedics and Traumatology clinic, SSK Ankara Dışkapı Education and Research Hospital (with clinical chief Dr. Sabahattin Özbek)

In 1985, he presented a talk about the place of tendon transfers in the treatment of polio at the World Pediatric Orthopedics Congress, held in Chicago. At this time, he met someone who led him to study pediatric orthopedics. This person was Ohannes Mihran Tachdjian. Dr. Ömer Çeliker worked as Tachdjian's assistant for a while. During his stay, he spent all of his time outside of clinic hours with the team writing the textbooks 'Pediatric Orthopaedics' and 'Foot', which Tachdjian was writing. Many years later, when I asked him how he knew Tachdjian's book by heart, he said that this was due to the time that he spent with the writing team.

In 1986, he attended a course on arthroscopy and arthroplasty in the UK.

In 1987, he achieved his Clinical Chief Assistant Exam and he began to work as the assistant chief in the same clinic (Figure-5). In the same year, he presented posters in conferences held in Egypt and Greece.



Figure-5. Dr. Ömer Çeliker, Clinical Chief Dr. Kemalettin Ardıçoğlu, Dr. Erol Süldür, Dr. Ersan Boysan and Dr. Sezgin Yazıcı with other specialists.

In 1988, he attended Spine Surgery courses in Munich, Germany and Berck-sur-Mer, France (Figure-6).

In 1989, he discussed his closed reduction technique for child femur fractures at the Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America (POSNA) conference in Canada (Figure-7). After this conference, he became the first man from Turkey to attend the newly designed TSRH instrumentation course at the Scottish Rite Hospital, Texas. However, he was not able to perform this new system before his death, but the TSRH system

was performed by his students at the SSK Ankara Hospital for the first time in Turkey.

In 1990, he attended courses on 'Hip Dislocation' and 'Children's Feet' in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and a 'Total Hip Prosthesis' course in Lugano, Switzerland. During that time, he began to perform pes planus treatment with a new implant that had tremendous impact. This implant was patented in Yugoslavia and named an "endoprosthesis".

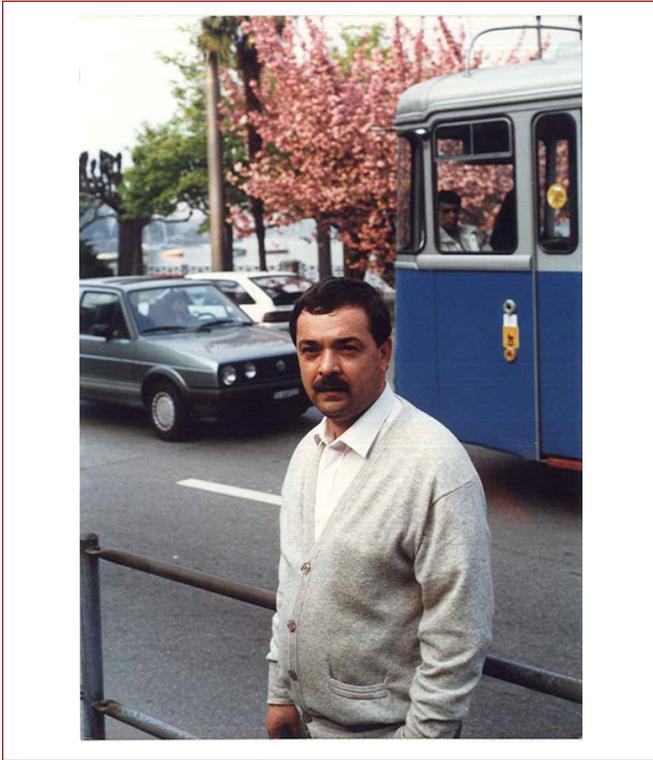


Figure-6. Dr. Ömer Çeliker in Munich

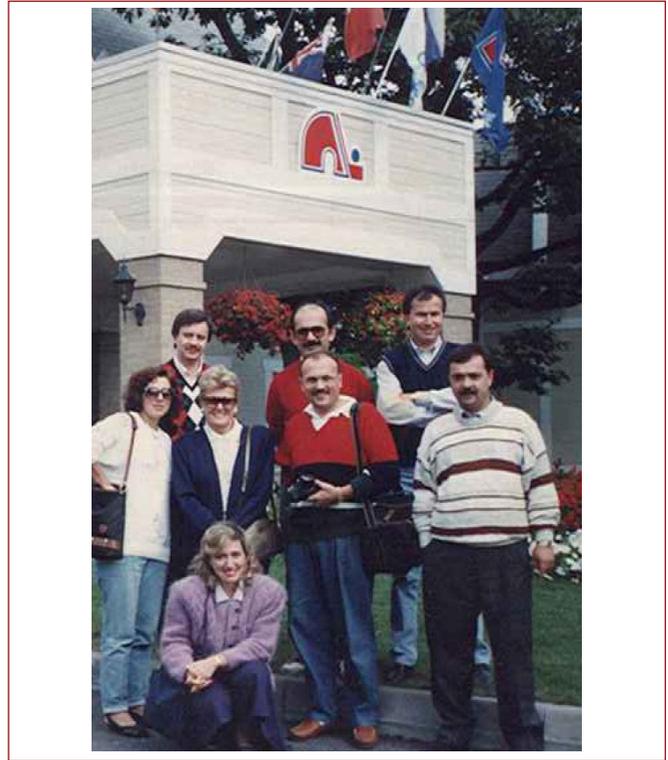


Figure-7. Dr. Ömer Çeliker at POSNA conference, Canada.

In 1991, he applied for the professorship exam, and gave his files to the Rectorship of Hacettepe University. However, his illness did not allow him to take the exam.

As described in part above, he made significant contributions to his field between 1988 and 1991, but when his sons were 6 and 12 years old, he was diagnosed with small cell lung cancer on 24 April 1991, as a result of tests done because of suspected bronchopneumonia (Figure-8). This information was deeply upsetting. It is unclear whether his tough childhood, being a smoker, or

using fluoroscopy at every phase of his surgeries out of caution was the cause of his cancer.

In May, he went to England with one of his assistants, who loved him very much (Dr. Fatih Pestilci). The diagnosis was verified and chemotherapy was begun. On his return, he stayed in Hacettepe Hospital where he had once been a student.

His assistants, caring for him greatly, and his younger brother, stayed with him until his last day. He was sent home when all hope was lost, and he died leaving his friends in deep sorrow on 7 August 1991.



Figure-8. Dr. Ömer Çeliker, his wife Dr. Silva Çeliker, and their sons, Umut and Berk.

HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO TURKISH SPINE SURGERY

Dr. Ömer Çeliker developed his ambition towards spine surgery when he was an assistant. His expert thesis was about the “Results of Application of Harrington Rod in Idiopathic Scoliosis”.

In 1988, he attended one-week courses in Paris, France with Dr. Dubousset, and in Berck-sur-Mer with Dr. Chopin, and he learned the Cotrel-Dubousset instrumentation and technique that was very popular at that time (Figure-9). In 1989, he arranged a Cotrel-Dubousset instrumentation course, at which the operation was broadcast live for the first time in the history of SSK, and Dr. Daniel Chopin from France attended. Specialists attended the course from all over Turkey. A debate appeared in the press as to who performed the operation of this system for the first time in Turkey. Although the importing firm stated that they first sold the product to SSK Dışkapı Hospital, this discussion has continued for years.

However, it is indisputably certain that the first workshop and meeting about Cotrel-Dubousset instrumentation were arranged by Dr. Ömer Çeliker, and organized in the SSK Ankara Education Hospital, Ankara. The second day of the course was held in the Türk-İş Hall in Kızılay. At this meeting, Dr. Daniel Chopin discussed the application areas of the derotation maneuver and Cotrel-Dubousset instrumentation, which were revolutionary in those days (Figure-10). In addition, Dr. Çeliker presented his own cases.



Figure-9. Dr. Dubousset

Many specialists reacted against the derotation maneuver model, which was passed around in the meeting, and they considered it to be a toy and not practically possible. In fact, a senior specialist stated that this technique was a balloon and it would explode soon, implying that this was also the case for the rapidly increasing popularity of Dr. Ömer Çeliker. However, Dr. Daniel Chopin was a guest speaker at the First International Turkish Spine Congress arranged the next year and an “Honorary Member of the Turkish Spine Society” award was given to him by the same senior specialist who made the comment about the balloon.

Dr. Ömer Çeliker presented idiopathic scoliosis cases and patients with vertebral fractures who were treated with Cotrel-Dubousset instrumentation at the First Spine Surgery Congress, and this was published as an article in our journal in the same year⁶⁻⁸.

The use of Cotrel-Dubousset instrumentation and its modifications increasingly spread to all countries. After a few years, the old instrumentation techniques were no longer used, and many people attended Cotrel-Dubousset instrumentation courses in France. As a result, Dr. Ömer Çeliker took the initiative for the entry and spread of third generation modern systems to Turkey, and he took a place as a real pioneer of Turkish Spine Surgery.



Figure-10. Dr. Daniel Chopin

Dr. Ömer Çeliker had two articles published in an “SCI Core” index, 20 articles published in national journals, 12 posters presented at International Conferences and 15 posters presented at National Conferences. Dr. Ömer Çeliker was also a member of many international organizations, such as GICD (Groupe Internationale de Cotrel Dubousset), ESDS (European Spinal Deformities Society), SRS (Scoliosis Research Society) and EPOS (European Pediatric Orthopaedics Society).

CONCLUSION

All of his sisters graduated from primary school, but they were unable to continue their education, due to their father. He sent his youngest brother, Abdurrahman Çeliker, to school himself. He supported his university education, until his brother graduated from the Electrical and Electronic Engineering Department, Hacettepe University.

Dr. Ömer Çeliker was a good instructor and a good person. He shared whatever he knew with his students. He fully supported the development of his assistants. He taught us how to be good people, as well as how to be good doctors. In addition to his duty as an instructor, he was also our best friend, and he was not only the father of Umut and Berk, but of all his assistants.

Dr. Ömer Çeliker was a true Kemalist and a true child of the Republic. In addition to orthopedics, he was someone with whom we could discuss the enlightenment and life philosophy. He taught us to be brave and to not give up, despite obstacles. All we have subsequently achieved in spine surgery is due to the working ambition and courage that he developed in us. Turkish spine surgery owes much to this brave pioneer, as we do.

We are still in deep sorrow due to the loss of Dr. Ömer Çeliker at an age at which he would have been most productive, and we remember him with gratitude and mercy once again. Rest in peace.

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