



## MEHMET ZİLELİ: A PIONEER, A MASTER, AND A MENTOR

### *MEHMET ZİLELİ: BİR ÖNCÜ, BİR USTA VE BİR YOL GÖSTERİCİ*

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#### SUMMARY

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Zileli was born in 1956. In 1980, he did graduate from Ege University Faculty of Medicine. He completed his neurosurgery speciality education in the same university. He became assistant Professor of Neurosurgery in 1989, associate professor of neurosurgery in 1989, professor of neurosurgery in 1996 in Ege University Department of Neurosurgery, Izmir, Turkey. Since late 1980's he interested to spine surgery. In mid 1990's he completed spine fellowships in USA. He became founding president of the Spine Section of Turkish Neurosurgical Society. During the last 20 years he worked hardly on different aspects of spine surgery. He published many manuscripts and books. He actively worked in many national and international societies and journals. Prof. Zileli has been a good teacher, and mentor who trained many spine surgeons.

**Key Words:** Prof. Dr. Mehmet Zileli, spinal diseases, spine surgery, Ege University Faculty of Medicine.

**Level of Evidence:** Biography, Level V

#### ÖZET

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Zileli 1956 yılında dünyaya gelmiştir. Dr. Zileli nöroşirürji uzmanlığını aynı kurumda yapmış, 1989'da yardımcı doçent, 1989'da doçent, 1996 yılında profesör olmuştur. Dr. Zileli 1980'li yılların sonlarından itibaren omurga cerrahisine ilgi duymuş, 1990'lı yılların ortasında Amerika Birleşik Devletlerinde omurga cerrahisinde üst eğitim almıştır. Dr. Zileli Türk Nöroşirürji Derneği Spinal Cerrahi Grubunun kurucu başkanı olup, son 20 yılda omurga cerrahisi alanında yoğun olarak çalışmıştır. Dr. Zileli omurga cerrahisi ile ilgili birçok makale ve kitap yazmış, birçok ulusal ve uluslararası dernekte görev almıştır. Prof. Zileli birçok omurga cerrahinin gelişiminde rol alan iyi bir eğitmen ve mentördür.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Prof. Dr. Mehmet Zileli, omurga hastalıkları, spinal cerrahi, Ege Üniversitesi Tıp Fakültesi

**Kanıt Düzeyi:** Biyografi, Düzey V

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*A great teacher has little external history to record. His life goes over into other lives. These men are pillars in the intimate structure of our schools. They are more essential than its stones or beams, and they will continue to be a kindling force and a revealing power in our lives.*

Quotes from emperors' club.

## INTRODUCTION

It was 1983, when I was student in Ege University school of medicine. At that times, there was final thesis even for medical students. My thesis topic was cyst hydatics. I used to call operated cases, and examine them with residents. I met for the first time with Dr. Mehmet Zileli, resident of nerosurgery in Ege University school of medicine, at that time. This started a friendship which increased with the time. Next year, on 1984 December, I started to my neurosurgery training programme. However, our firendship continued during last 33 years. These years showed that he was not only a friend, but also a teacher, and a mentor, in the field of spine health care medicine.

As other medical disciplines, spine medicine has a unique story. Spine surgery develops in many countries as a result of improvements in different surgical disciplines. Previous developments before 1950'ies have not been specialized, except for some developments in specific centers. Spine surgery, as a separate discipline, started to grow after advancements in microsurgery, biomechanics, methalurgy, and imaging. All these advancements changed many concepts in spine surgery. These changes resulted in establishment of new institutions and occurence of new figures in the field of spine surgery. Some

of these figures are pioneers. Dr. Mehmet Zileli is among the pioneers in the field of spine surgery. I will try to summarize life, studies and contributions of Dr. Zileli.

## LIFE STORY

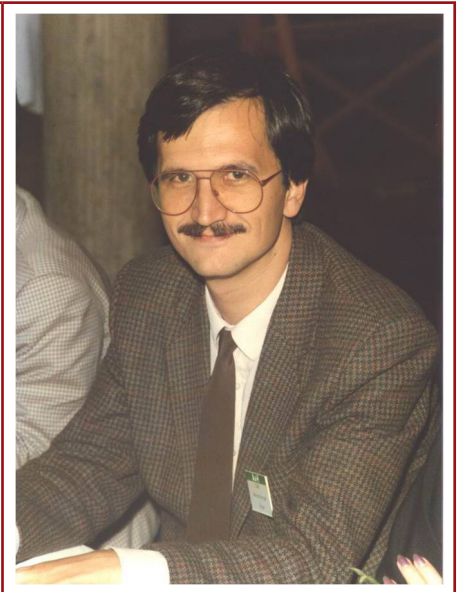
Mehmet Zileli was born in Kırkağaç, Manisa, Turkey, in November 30, 1956. He did graduate from Ege University Faculty of Medicine, Izmir, Turkey, in 1980. He completed his residency in neurosurgery after working as resident in the Department of Neurosurgery, Ege University Faculty of Medicine, Izmir, Turkey, in years between 1980 and 1986 (Fig.1).

After being neurosurgeon he worked as research fellow in different centers, including Department of Neurosurgery, University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany, (with Professor Johannes Schramm, 1987-1988), University of Bonn, Department of Neurosurgery (with J.Schramm June 1991), Division of Neurosurgery, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, U.S.A. (with Dr.E.C.Benzel, November-December 1996), and Barrow Neurological Institute, Phoenix, Arizona, U.S.A. (with Dr.VKH Sonntag, January 1997).

He became assistant Professor of Neurosurgery in 1989, associate professor of neurosurgery in 1989, professor of neurosurgery in 1996 in Ege University Department of Neurosurgery, Izmir, Turkey, where he worked until 2011 (Fig. 2). He became chairman of the department of neurosurgery between 2009 and 2011, and retired from university position in 2011. Since 2011 he works in private practice.



**Figure-1.** Dr. Zileli with some residents and professors in Ege University (1985)



**Figure-2.** Dr. Mehmet Zileli (1987)

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF DR. ZILELI TO SPINE SURGERY

In early 1990s Dr. Erdem Tunçbay, founding chairman of the Department of Neurosurgery in Ege University, encouraged Dr. Zileli to work in the field of spine surgery. Soon, Dr. Zileli started to work in the field of spine surgery. It was the second division of the department after pediatric neurosurgery division. Dr. Zileli answers the question “why did you choose spine surgery?”: “I was trained to be a perfect neurosurgeon. I did some research in Germany with Professor Schramm on intraoperative monitoring. My first interest was on neurophysiology, more on electrophysiology. I was too much interested on direct recordings from the brain and spinal cord. I have got a continuing support from Humboldt Foundation and created a Clinical Neurophysiology Laboratory in the department. I had also interest on functional issues and pain. However, as a practicing neurosurgeon the senior members in the department did not allow me to work on the brain. Being a brain surgeon, operating on cerebral aneurysms were a much privileged area. They left me the spine surgery, which was a quite neglected discipline compared to others. After being an associate professor in 1989, I gave most of my power to learn and practice spine surgery. In the following years, it did not make me disappointed. By the years, spine surgery among Neurosurgeons reached a more privileged place”.

Working in a specific branch made him think about the possibility of his role in the field of spine surgery in Turkey. Therefore, he and Dr. Fahir Özer have started the steps by applying to Prof. Dr. Yücel Kanpolat, President of Turkish Neurosurgical Society, to establish spine section under the umbrella of the society. This application was accepted and the spine section was established in 1995. Dr. Zileli was

the founding president of the Spine Section of the Turkish Neurosurgical Society. Soon after, first symposium of the Spine Section was held in 1996 in Izmir. This was the first step of the hard working in this field. The first hands on courses have aimed to teach pedicle screw fixation, fusion techniques to neurosurgeons. Dr. Zileli remarks “Until late 1989s, neurosurgeons were mainly performing decompressive surgeries. It was important because there were many neurosurgery departments that were performing simple laminectomy after trauma and scheduling a fixation/fusion surgery to another stage. These courses changed this situation.

He organised many basic and advanced spine courses (16 courses since 1997) (Fig. 3). Izmir courses are now an advanced spine course, and Turkish Neurosurgical Society has declared the name of the course to be “Dr. Mehmet Zileli Advanced Spine Course”. He was selected as director of the host institute of “Travelling Fellowship of Spine Society of Europe”, 2002, 2003, 2004, and director of the “Spine Fellowship Programs for Neurosurgeons” since 1996. Ege Neurosurgery Department has been the first neurosurgery department that pioneered training and education of many fellows. Even after leaving the university those efforts have continued and he has trained 35 national and 44 international fellows. He organised Aegean Spine Review 2003, 2005 and 2010 “Cadaver Course and Symposia”, Izmir: in collaboration with Cleveland Clinic, Ege University, and Dokuz Eylül University (Fig. 4).

Dr. Zileli published many manuscripts and books (Table-1). Dr. Mehmet Zileli and Dr. Fahir Ozer have edited a multiauthor spine book first in 1997. Third edition of the book was published in 2014 with three volumes. This book has been widely accepted as a reference for many surgeons.



**Figure-3.** Zileli during one of spine courses in Ege University (2003)



**Figure-4.** Zileli during hands-on course with Cleveland Clinic performed in Ege University (2005)



**Table-1.** Books edited, co-edited or authored by Dr. Mehmet Zileli

1. Ertekin C, Zileli M, Ertaş M. **Motor Evoked Potentials** (Turkish) Publications of the Association of Clinical Neurophysiology and EEG-EMG. No:1, İzmir, 1992
2. Zileli M. **Electrophysiological Monitoring Techniques in Neurosurgery**. (Turkish) Publications of the Society of Clinical Neurophysiology and EEG-EMG, No:3, İzmir, 1994
3. Zileli M, Özer F. **Spine and Spinal Cord Surgery**. (Turkish) 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. Saray Med.Publ, İzmir, 1997
4. Zileli M, Özer F. **Spine and Spinal Cord Surgery**. (Turkish) 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition., 2014
5. Demircan N, Zileli M. **Peripheral Nerve Surgery**. (Turkish) Turkish Neurosurgical Society Publications, No:6, 2008,
6. Korfalı E, Zileli M. **Basic Neurosurgery**. (Turkish) Turkish Neurosurgical Society Publications, No:10, 2010, ISBN: 978-605-4149-04-9
7. Ramani PS, Shoda M, Zileli M, Dohrmann GJ. (English) **Surgical Management of Cervical Disc Herniation**. Jaypee Med Pub, New Delhi, 2012

His training efforts have also evolved in international level (**Fig.5**). He has been the chairman or moderator in many spine courses and cadaver workshops in Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and a resident course in Berlin. One such efforts was to establish the Middle East Spine Society in 2011. After organizing two congresses of the Middle East Spine Society, he is organizing an advanced international course called “Istanbul Spine Masters”.



**Figure-5.** Dr. Zileli and Dr. Benzel

He responded to my question “Do you think we as spine surgeons in Turkey have reached a satisfactory level? What is the future of spine surgery?”

“This is a difficult question to answer. The level of spine surgery has improved a lot during the last 20 years. However, there are many critics that some surgeries are with wide indications, and there are many unnecessary applications of spinal implants. Such critics are not just in our country, but international level. Such conditions may only be avoided by more training. Fellowship programs must be improved, courses and cadaver

workshops in the hands of societies, not by companies must be increased. I also criticise the training if it is done with the images of the patients. General level of spine surgery in Turkey is quite advanced both in the hands of neurosurgeons and orthopedic surgeons. For that reason, we can play a role in improving the spine surgery and train the surgeons in Middle East region and some other resource challenging countries.

The future of the spine surgery will be affected by many issues. Aging populations will force us to apply more surgeries in elderly, which is full with traps. I also have some bad expectation for the future, since we do not improve our skills of choosing proper patients for surgery and getting less patient cooperation, relying more on the images. Another future expectation is that I believe the spine will be a discipline, not a subspecialty under neuro or ortho surgery.” he said.

He has memberships in many international spine societies (**Table-2**):

He was appointed in many societies, and worked hard for advancements in spine surgery worldwide.

**Current appointments of Dr. Zileli are as follows:**

- Honorary President, Middle East Spine Society (2015-Present)
- Executive Committee Member World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies Spine Section, 2009-present
- Executive Committee Member World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies Training and Education Committee, 2009-2013
- Executive Committee Member, Asian Congress of Neurological Surgeons, 2009-Present
- Executive Committee Member, Asia-Pacific Cervical Spine Society, 2009-Present
- Executive Committee Member, AOSpine Turkey (Neuro Education), 2013-Present
- Honorary President ISMISS Turkey Congress, 2015, 2016

**Table-2.** Memberships of Dr. Zileli

***Memberships in International Societies:***

World Spinal Column Society (WScS) (President, 2011-2014)  
Middle East Spine Society (President, 2011-2015)  
Asia Pacific Cervical Spine Society (APCSS) (Ex-com member)  
American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS)  
Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS)  
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Neurochirurgie (German Neurosurgical Society)  
European Association of Neurosurgical Societies (EANS) Individual Member  
Spine Society of Europe (SSE)  
North American Spine Society (NASS)  
Cervical Spine Research Society (CSRS)  
International Medical Society of Paraplegia (IMSOP)  
International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP)  
International Brain Research Organisation (IBRO)  
ARGOS Society  
AO Spine Society  
International Society for Minimal Intervention in Spinal Surgery (ISMISS)  
Asian Congress of Neurosurgery (ACNS)  
International Society for the Advancement of Spine Surgery (ISASS)  
The Mediterranean Association of Neurological Surgeons (*Founding member*)

***Memberships in National Societies:***

Turkish Neurosurgical Society  
Spine and Peripheral Nerve Section of the Turkish Neurosurgical Society  
Turkish Spine Society (TSS)  
Turkish Society of Spinal Cord Diseases (TrSCD)  
Turkish Society of Clinical Neurophysiology and EEG-EMG  
Turkish Society of Brain Research and Neuroscience (TÜBAS)  
Turkish Neuroscience Society  
Turkish Society of Pain  
Turkish Society of Emergency Medicine (ATD)  
Turkish Society of Spinal Cord Paralyzed (OFD)  
Turkish Society of Neurooncology  
Ege Medical Faculty Social Support and Aid Society  
Ege Faculty Members Society  
Humboldt Scholars Society

***His previous spine appointments are as following:***

Founding President, Spine Section of Turkish Neurosurgical Society, 1995-1999  
Vice President, Turkish Society of Clinical Neurophysiology and EEG-EMG, 1993-1995  
Member, Turkish Neurosurgical Society Long Term Planning Committee, 2001-2004  
Member, Spine Society of Europe, Educational Committee, 2004-2006  
Executive Committee Member, Treasurer, World Spine Society 2003-2009

Program Chairman, World Spine IV Congress, Istanbul, Turkey, 2007  
President, Turkish Neurosurgical Society, 2006-2008  
First Vice Chairman, World Spine Society, 2007-2008  
President, 6th Black Sea Neurosurgical Congress, 2009, Istanbul, Turkey  
Vice President, World Spinal Column Society 2009-2010  
President, Turkish Neurosurgery Board, (2010-2012)  
Chairman, 1<sup>st</sup> Middle East Spine Meeting, Istanbul, Turkey, 2011  
Chairman, 9<sup>th</sup> Asian Congress of Neurological Surgeons (ACNS), 2012, Istanbul, Turkey

Chairman, 2<sup>nd</sup> Middle East Spine Meeting, Izmir, Turkey, 2013  
President, World Spinal Column Society (2010-2014)  
President, Middle East Spine Society, (2011-2015)

### **Awards and Grants:**

Dr. Zileli gained many grants and awards in the field of spine surgery (**Fig. 6**)(**Table-3**).

He is also member of advisory board - editorial committee – reviewer in many medical Journals, listed below:



**Figure-6.** Dr. Zileli during award ceremony (1989)

**Table-3.** Awards and Grants of Dr. Mehmet Zileli

1974-1980, Educational grant of “Turkish Scientific and Technical Research Council” for university students  
1987-1988, Research grant of Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Bonn, Germany, “Spinal Cord Monitoring”  
1989, Second prize winner of “Poster Presentations Award” of 40th Congress of German Neurosurgical Society  
1989, First prize winner of a national award, “Neurological Sciences Research Competition”  
2005, First prize winner of a Best Poster Award “Cervical Spine Research Society, European Section” Meeting in Rome Italy  
2009, Best Research Paper Award, Federation of Turkish Pathology Societies, Turkish Journal of Pathology  
2009, Honorary Member “Indian Neurospinal Foundation”  
2010, Turkish Neurosurgical Society Outstanding Service Award

### **Journals listed in SCI-expanded**

Turkish Clinics 2008-2013 (Editor of Neurosurgery)  
Turkish Neurosurgery 2003-present (Editorial Board Member)

The Spine Journal 2011-present (Editorial Board Member)  
Journal of Craniovertebral Junction and Spine, 2009-present (Editorial Board Member)  
Journal of Neurological Sciences (Turkish) 2003-Present (Advisory Board member)  
Spine Journal, 2004-present (Reviewer)  
Spinal Cord (Reviewer)  
European Spine Journal (Reviewer)  
Central European Neurosurgery 2007-present (Reviewer)  
Acta Neurochirurgica 2008-present (Reviewer)  
Child’s Nervous System 2010-present (Reviewer)  
Asian Journal of Neurosurgery (Reviewer)  
International Journal of Orthopaedics, 2014-present (Editorial Board Member)  
Spinal Cord Series and Cases (Reviewer)  
International J of Integrated Health Sciences (Editorial Board Member)  
Asian Spine J (Editorial Board Member)  
Neurosurgical Review (Reviewer)  
European Spine Journal (Assistant Editor)  
World Journal of Orthopedics (Reviewer)  
Moroccan J Neurosurg (Editorial Board Member)  
Saudi Medical J (Reviewer)  
World Neurosurgery (Reviewer, Art Director)  
The Journal of Spinal Surgery (Reviewer)

### **Other Journals**

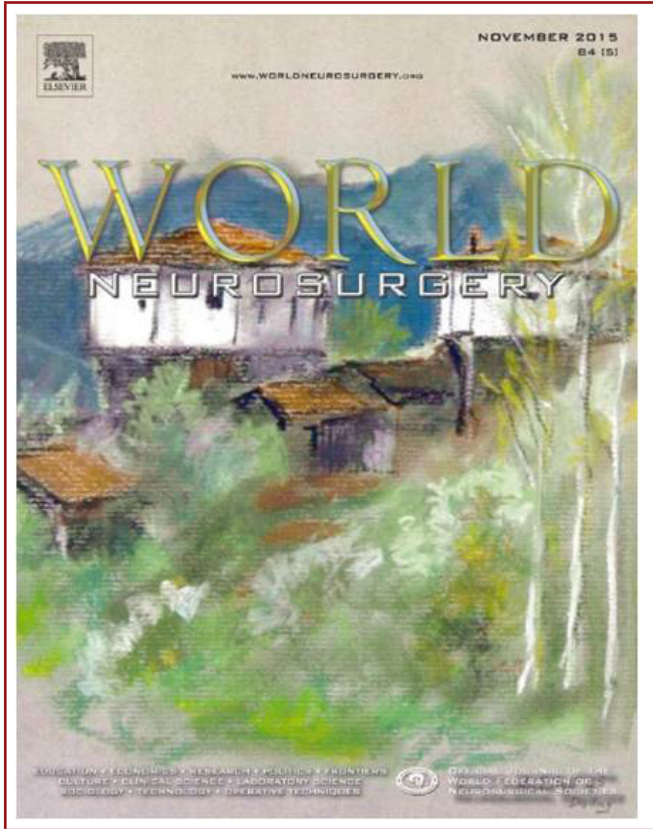
World Spinal Column Journal, 2009 present (Editorial Board Member)  
Journal of Neurosciences in Rural Practice (Editorial Board Member)  
Journal of Spine Surgery (India), 2009-present (Editorial Board Member)  
Pakistan Journal of Neurological Surgery, 2011-present (Reviewer)  
The Journal of Turkish Spinal Surgery 2004-present (Editorial Board Member)  
Turkish Journal of Emergency Medicine 2005-present (Editorial Board Member)  
Ege Medical Journal 2004-present (Editorial Board Member)  
Adnan Menderes University Medical Journal 2007-present (Editorial Board Member)  
Trakya Medical Journal 2007-present (Reviewer)  
Literature Journal 2006-present (Editorial Board Member)  
Medimagazin (Column author)  
Medical Sciences (**Reviewer**)

He is currently art director of World Neurosurgery (**Fig. 7**). He is married, with Dr. Berna Zileli and has two children, Başak and Ekin (**Fig. 8,9**). He can speak Turkish (native), English and German in fluent level. Some of his studies and contribution were listed in reference list.



## Last Words

This study confirms that Dr. Zileli worked in all fields of spine surgery since early 1990's, as surgeon, as teacher, as academician, and as mentor. He has been Pioneer of many aspects of spine surgery in our country, particularly among neurological spine surgeons. His contributions enlightened the road of many young surgeons.



**Figure-7.** One painting painted by Dr. Zileli in the cover of World Neurosurgery



**Figure-8.** Dr. Zileli and his wife Berna Zileli



**Figure-9.** Dr. Zileli and his wife Berna Zileli

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