

After Prof. Dr. Turgut Zileli (21 March 1924-23 March 2021)

Prof. Dr. Turgut Zileli was a distinguished neurologist who played an important role in the development of modern neurology in Turkey. He was the founder and chairman of the Neurology Department of Hacettepe University Faculty of Medicine (HUTF), and later the head of the Baskent UTF Neurology Department. He contributed to the training of many specialists and students, and treatment of thousands of patients.

Turgut Zileli was born in 1924 in Develi, Kayseri. He lost his father when he was three years old. Throughout his life, he received the greatest support from his older brother Şeref Zileli. Şeref Zileli (1915-1976) specialized in Internal Medicine and Endocrinology, was trained by Prof. Dr. Frank in Istanbul University, had some of his education and research at Harvard University, USA. He was exemplary scientist who later worked at HUTF and left many important studies behind, throughout his life which could be considered short. Turgut Zileli mentioned about his brother with love, respect and gratitude.

Turgut Zileli, who started training at the Istanbul Faculty of Medicine after finishing his study from Istanbul High School, graduated in 1950. Between 1950-1955, he specialized in neurology at Istanbul University Medical School- Cerrahpaşa Hospital. He used to tell that he worked voluntarily for a while due to lack of staff. He was very impressed by Prof. Dr. Necmettin Polvan (1907-1981) who was at that time the chief of the clinic and an expert in neuro-psycho-pharmacology.

In 1954, he got married to Leyla Koperler, who was doing her psychiatry residency in the same institution. He completed his military service at Hadımköy Military Hospital between 1955-1957. He went to the USA in 1957 and worked at the Bellevue Hospital of the University of New York for a short time. Later, in the Department of Neurology at the University of Kansas School of Medicine, he worked with Prof. Dr. D. K. Ziegler. At that time, his studies focused mostly on cerebrovascular diseases. In 1959-1962, he continued his studies at New York Cornell Medical Center with Prof. Dr. H.G. Wolf. In those years, they carried out important studies that shed light on the pathophysiology of migraine. Turgut Zileli would tell that the years spent in the USA were full of financial difficulties, but that reaching science required dedication. They had no intention of living there, they believed that it was best to learn new things and return to their homeland.

He returned to Turkey in 1962 and started working at the Istanbul American Hospital. In the same year, he went to Ankara with the invitation of Prof. Dr. İhsan Doğramacı and established the Neurology Department at Hacettepe Hospital, which was not a faculty yet. The founding team formed with the participation of Orhan Kalabay (1925-1981), who specialized in neurology at the University of Virginia and then returned to his homeland after studying epilepsy and EEG at McGill University, took an important place in the history of Turkish Neurology. He became

Associate Professor in 1965. He went abroad again between 1967-1969 and worked as "associate professor" in the Department of Neurology at the University of Kansas. He returned to HUTF in 1970, became a professor, and served as the head of the department until his retirement in 1992. In this process, he served as a member of the Interuniversity Board on behalf of Hacettepe University, as the Founding Dean of Kayseri Gevher Nesibe Faculty of Medicine, as a University Senator, as a member of the HUTF Board of Directors and as the Head of the Internal Sciences Department (Picture 1).

His greatest contribution was to train Neurology specialists and academicians working in various regions of Turkey. After the establishment of HUTF Neurology Department in 1962, 67 neurology specialists have been trained in the past 37 years. Okay Sarıbaş in 1966, and then Farabi Dora, Kaynak Selekler, Abdurrahman Ciger, Mehmet Atalag, Mesude Durguner, Tülay Kansu, Kubilay Varlı, Turgay Dalkara, Bülent Elibol, Rana Karabudak, Serap Saygı, Ersin Tan, Gülay Nurlu and Mehmet Demirci in the following years were included in the faculty member staff and worked with Turgut Zileli. Turgut Zileli has always supported the Pediatric Neurology studies initiated by Yavuz Renda and Kalbiye Yalaz within the body of the Department of Pediatrics in 1963. He argued that physicians who would specialize in Pediatric Neurology could be pediatrician or neurologist, but should receive training in the other branch for 2 years. Before this could be applied, Pediatric Neurology has become only a sub-branch of Pediatrics with the decision of the Ministry of Health in 2011.

Joint training programs with Pediatric Neurology and Neurosurgery were carried out in good cooperation and friendship.



Picture 1. 1985

The best example of this cooperation was the joint meetings held on Wednesdays. Turgut Zileli would sit in the front row and be at the center of discussions and jokes. With the varying of topics and concerns, the interest shown in these meetings has decreased in recent years.

The Department of Neurology, which initially consisted of Clinical Neurology, Electroencephalography and Neuroradiology units, became a larger department which included Clinical Neurophysiology, Epilepsy, Neuro-muscular Diseases, Movement Diseases, Neuro-immunology, Cerebrovascular diseases, Neuro-ophthalmology, Behavioral Neurology, and Neuroscience in parallel with the developments in neurological sciences and with the participation of trained staff. Planning with the future in mind became a department strategy that Turgut and the faculty members he worked with adopted, and thanks to this, many missing areas found the opportunity to improve in the department. In the 60s and 70s, invasive examinations such as angiography, pneumoencephalography (PEG), myelography were performed by neurologists. When the subject became more attractive with the development of computed tomography (CT) and Magnetic Resonance (MR), radiologists adopted neuroradiology. Examinations such as PEG and myelography have also become a thing of the past.

In 1982, with the support of Turgut Zileli, Hacettepe University Neurological Sciences and Psychiatry Institute was established. With the contributions of the faculty members of the Neurology Department, it became possible to train academic staff and conduct experimental research in neurological sciences in the doctoral programs within the Institute.

It became necessary to separate Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry congresses, which were held jointly from 1964 to 1982, when the number of subjects increased and the subjects became different. For the first time in 1988, the Neurology Congress was held separately from the others under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Turgut Zileli. After that year, they held separate congresses for each of the three branches.

He retired due to the age limit in 1992. He worked as a private doctor for a short time and started to work as the Head of Neurology Department at Başkent University Medical Faculty in 1997, upon the invitation of Başkent University's founding rector Mehmet Haberal. They developed the Neurology department together with Sibel Benli and Ufuk Can who founded the department in 1995, and Münire Kılıç Toprak who joined the faculty staff shortly after, and trained 32 specialists between 2001-2016 (Picture 2).

Turgut Zileli gave great importance to education and work discipline throughout his life. He used to be in the department at 8:30 a.m. With such an example in front of them, other employees would beware of being late. Faculty members and assistants, who came early in the morning and finished their work in the evening, met in the tea room, had discussions about patients and pleasant conversations. He had a kind, caring but distant relationship with the assistants and other faculty members. He would make easy



Picture 2. 2009

and clear decisions, and even if he got angry, he would not break his calm. He didn't like being called "Hodja", he didn't like titles like brother, sister, aunt, and uncle. He would find new Turkish terms artificial, preferring the old equivalents we were used to. He would love football and used to take an active role in the games between the departments at the university. Although he had certain political views, he took utmost care not to mix this with his professional life and patient relations. He became the target of some groups in the increasing rightism-leftism conflicts in the late 70s, and had to go everywhere with a guard beside him for a while.

He pioneered the acquisition of CT and MR devices in Hacettepe and their use in Turkey. Despite being very open to innovations, he always believed in the importance of bedside neurological examination and emphasized it in his lectures. As long as his health allowed, he continued to do his favorite job, teaching students and residents. His contribution to education was not limited to lectures. He provided the translation of ten neurology books into Turkish, thus enabling neurologists to access up-to-date books. He has 44 articles in Web of Science (WOS) and 200 publications in Turkish journals. He received the Turkish Neurological Society Science and Service Award in 2009 for his contributions to neurology in Turkey.

His wife Leyla Zileli had a very important place in Turgut Zileli's life. Prof. Dr. Leyla Zileli (1925-2008) was one of the most beloved professors of HUTF and one of the best representatives of Psychoanalytic Psychiatry in the world. She left important marks in our lives. We remember both of them with love and respect.

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