

PROFESSOR HAKAN CANER

A Life Devoted to Neurosurgery



Hakan Caner was born on March 15, 1959 in Ankara, Turkey. His father was a colonel in the army and his mother a philosophy teacher at high school.

He graduated from Atatürk High School in Ankara with the highest marks in his class. He was placed as 34th student on the nationwide examination for university entrance. This remarkable success coupled with his decision to be a physician paved the way for his gaining entrance at Hacettepe University Medical School in Ankara.

From 1976 to 1982 he was a medical student and he received a scholarship from "The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey".

He worked for 2 months as an observer in the Neurosurgery Department of Ulm University, Germany while he was a fifth grader.

After graduating from Hacettepe University he started his obligatory state service in the Gümüşhane province. In the meantime he married Dr. Biray Caner on January 10, 1983.

Dr. Biray Caner specialized in nuclear medicine and continued her career at Hacettepe University where she was eventually promoted to professor. They had 2 sons, Doruk and Kaan.

He began his residency in the Neurosurgery Department of Hacettepe University in 1984.

During 1988 and 1989, he worked as a clinical and research fellow at Department of Neurosurgery of Fukui University, Japan. He also worked in the universities of Gunma and Keio for 4 weeks observing stereotactic surgery. He worked at the Kassel laboratory in the Neurosurgery Department of Virginia University. He mainly focused on cerebral ischemia and vasospasm. He received his specialist degree on 1992.

My personal contact with Hakan Caner began in the early nineties. He was recognized as an outstanding, promising young resident at the Neurosurgery Department of Hacettepe University. I thought it would be a good idea to work with him

and phoned him only explaining my idea without any specific proposal.

The conversation did not last long and his answer was positive. We began thinking about how we could work together in a center where we could enjoy our practice.

President Turgut Özal was greatly supportive of İnönü University in the province of Malatya located in eastern Turkey. The university had a collaboration protocol with Baylor College of Medicine, in Houston, Texas and faculty members were scheduled to work there for approximately a year and a half. We made attempts to secure collaboration with the administration of İnönü University. After a time a new private university was established in Ankara, Turkey. It was Başkent University,

Professor Mehmet Haberal, a general surgeon, was the founder and first rector. He is an ambitious and hard-working doctor who performed the first renal and liver transplants in the country. He pioneered several new developments and innovations in transplant surgery and also spent a great amount of time preparing and passing of the law "Harvesting, Storage, Grafting and Transplant of Organs and Tissues".

This new collaboration prompted us to work with Başkent University. Hakan and I corresponded frequently while he was in the United States and discussed future plans.

Shortly after his return from Virginia University in 1993, he began working at Başkent University.

My appointment as the Chairman on January 15, 1995 marked the establishment of the Neurosurgery Department that consisted of only 2 faculty members at that time. We did everything together and we shared everything.

The department had the first 2 residents late in 1995. In the following years, the department gradually developed with addition of new colleagues and new residents.

Dr. Caner continued in his career at Başkent University. He became an associate professor in 1997 and was promoted to a Professor on 2002.

He worked in the Kassel laboratory for the second time for 2 months in 1994 and was called a visiting professor.

His daily practice included degenerative, traumatic and infectious spinal cases and adult spinal deformities. He performed percutaneous spinal instrumentation combined with minimally invasive transforaminal lumbar interbody fusion (Mis-TLIF). He was one of the most experienced spinal surgeons to practice surgery related to atlantoaxial fusion.

Dr. Caner and I participated together doing live kyphoplasty at Murnau Germany and postmortem surgery in Leiden, Holland in June 2002. Consequently our department was one of the first units and Hakan was a leading surgeon performing



percutaneous vertebral augmentation procedures in the country.

Başkent University initiated hospitals in Adana, Alanya, Konya, Izmir and İstanbul.

We established neurosurgery units at those centers. Dr. Caner and I went on to help our younger colleagues with complex surgical interventions. We also supported neurosurgeons advance academically at these hospitals and worked as an integrated team.

Dr. Caner's duties at Başkent University included membership in the executive committee of the medical faculty and in the committee of postgraduate education in medicine and the neuropsychiatry research center.

He was awarded several national and international prizes throughout his career. He received 3 research awards from the Turkish Neurosurgical Society (TNS). In 1991, the Angiology Society of America gave him the Award for Young Researchers. The Senate of Hacettepe University gave him the award of Scientific Success. In 1998 he received an award from "The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey".

Since 2007, he has been editor-in-chief for 2 official journals of the TNS. He exhibited good example of being a group leader. He and his coworkers spent zealous energy in harmony. The journals are enlisted both on Science Citation Index Expanded and PubMed with an impact factor 0.58.

Hakan Caner assumed different responsibilities in the TNS; he was a member of the executive committee and worked actively in the spinal and peripheral nerve surgery subgroup. He contributed to the activities of Turkish Spine Surgery (TSS) where he contributed to the development of academic curriculum.

A brief summary of his scientific publications reveals 78 articles of clinical and research, 45 articles of case reports, a technical note and letter to the editor published in journals included in the Science Citation Index Expanded. There were 14 articles published in peer-review journals that are included in international indexes but not in the Science Citation Index Expanded.

He published 36 articles in Turkish, has written 7 chapters in international books and 10 chapters in Turkish books. He was the editor of a Turkish book along with 103 presentations at international and 135 presentations at national scientific meetings.

His last project that sought to provide resistance to adhesion of bacteria to shunt catheters by using a plasma polymerization technique was performed in cooperation with Hacettepe University and supported by the European union.

Dr. Caner was deeply patient-oriented and did everything for the welfare of his patients. His approach was beyond the simple doctor-patient relationship. Instead he regarded

them as close and beloved relatives. He developed similar relationships with colleagues. He was kind and gentle to everybody and was unable to say "no".

His main hobbies were reading and sports. His areas of interest for reading were diverse, He enjoyed swimming regularly but could not run because of spinal surgery he had undergone many years ago. So he used to walk and did not quit even when he became ill.

In February 2011, examinations revealed gastric carcinoma. He underwent radical surgery in Japan, and after resting for a time started working full-time again. He enjoyed all his clinical, surgical and academic activities and did well until March 2013 when his disease recurred. His struggle for survival deserves

great appreciation. He underwent radiotherapy, heavy episodes of chemotherapy, and complications related to these therapies, but he stood firm and full of hope although he knew the prognosis of the illness.

He died at 7:50 AM, on December 18, 2013 at Başkent University Hospital where he served for more than 20 years. His wife and older son were at his bedside holding his hand.

The admirable life he lived, his academic achievements, scientific contributions and devotion to his profession made him one of the outstanding doctors of the Turkish neurosurgical community. I hope his work and memory will be an example for generations to come.

Prof. Mehmet Nur ALTINÖRS, MD

