

IN MEMORIAM

Q7 In memoriam: Ali Ayhan (1940-2024)

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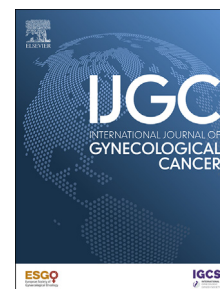
Prof Ali Ayhan passed away on June 10, 2024, after a grueling 2 months in hospital. Ali Ayhan was a prominent figure in Gynecologic Oncology. He was the founder of the discipline in Turkey and as often cited, served as the mentor of mentors. Today, almost all of the current generation of leaders of Gynecologic Oncology in Turkey have been trained by Ali Ayhan. He was 'the surgeon' for difficult cases. His work was not exclusively on the treatment of gynecologic malignancies, he also contributed significantly to the screening and diagnosis of gynecologic cancers as well as became a figure for public education. He personally led activities to disseminate the knowledge to his country (Fig. 1).

Dr Ayhan not only talked the talk. In addition to being a leader in the field in Turkey, his hard and tireless work provided him a well-deserved international recognition. He authored over 250 articles with a h-index of 36. He led to the establishment of the ESGO Textbook of Gynaecological Oncology which became the state-of-the-art reference in the field. Dr Ayhan served on the boards of prestigious journals in our field. He was a member of IGCS, ESGO alongside his lead role in the national organizations. He was the founding president of the Middle Eastern Mediterranean Association of Gynecologic Oncology. Dr Ayhan received the IGCS Lifetime Achievement Award in 2016 and the ESGO Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019 among many others. A more



Figure 1 Ali with his mom at the hospital, just before her departure. It was a treatable illness, and she probably passed away due to iatrogenic complications.

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detailed biography can be found on the IGCS website by David Attalah and Keiichi Fujiwara (Fig. 2).

Ali Ayhan continued operating until the very last day before his hospitalization. He even gave lectures and joined meetings while he was an inpatient. This was not surprising to us, this was Ali Ayhan as we know him. We also witnessed his enormous generosity to his peers and his patients which gave him a father-like status for many. His late-night feasts at his office hosting many of us were one of a kind in which work was mixed with friendship; the science intermingling with a love of people; and the difficulties and the complexities of life would eventually be resolved with joy. In this piece, his elder son will introduce the unknown Ali, his background, and his struggles which he did not like to mention publicly. He never liked excuses.

ALI AYHAN, AS YOU DON'T KNOW HIM

Ali was born in Nasrattin, a small Mediterranean village, to a family of a peasant father and an illiterate mother. He was the eldest of 5

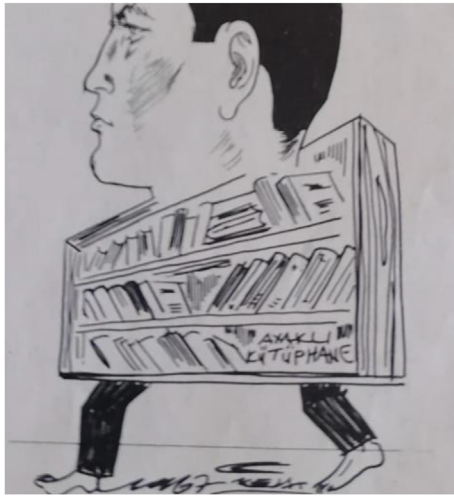


Figure 2 Depiction of Ali in the medical school yearbook. Says 'library on foot' on the cartoon. His friends mentioned his hard work and called him too absorbed, encouraging him to be more open to life's good.

and the latest to build a family for himself. They used to walk 7 km to get to school, and the path led through a river, costing him his only failed grade after a flood stole his papers. Failing the class hurt him more than the whipping he took (Figs. 3, 4 and 5).

After elementary school, his father didn't allow him to leave town, 'you will not be able to go to university anyways' 'he told him, 'then you'll become a useless hen-thief'. It took 3 years and his mother's support to escape from the village in the back of a wooden truck.

'My Ayhan', as his mother used to caress him, went to high school in a distant town. These days must have given him his life-long self-competence. He was always hardworking, but actually was idolized among students for being kind and considerate; always there when needed. I've recently learned that the high school did not have enough science teachers and he personally organized the parents and sent letters to the governor, the State of Education, and even to the president of Turkey, leading to the appointment of more than 10 science teachers within a few weeks. The path was cleared.

Following high school, his journey to Istanbul began. Ali was the doctor of his village as soon as he became a medical student. He once laughingly told that the villagers brought him a person with an incarcerated hernia and he did what he had overheard from them: hung the guy upside-down to place the hernia back! When he was in fifth grade, his most precious mother got sick and he brought her to his hospital. One morning, he found his mother's bed cleaned and empty for good. A page had turned.

The path his mother paved for him was to be completed. He finished medical school at the top of his class. Started ob-gyn residency. I learned at his funeral that the jury, despite his stellar record, was hesitant to enroll him due to his accent which reveals his peasant roots. He always remained very conscious about his way of speaking in public. He was more than what he displayed.

This piece is about the unknown Ali, no need to mention his passion for gynecologic oncology. The first day I entered psychiatry residency, he shook my hand, congratulated me, and asked with all his seriousness 'Now tell me the truth, you actually wanted to be a gynecologist, but you found that hard, didn't you?' (*Father, at the*



Figure 3 Ali Ayhan was instrumental in disseminating knowledge about gynecologic cancers. He organized many lectures and events, bringing together the public and health professionals (haberanamur.net).



Figure 4 The Prof Dr Ali Ayhan campus of the Mersin University. The establishment of this campus was one of his life-long goals. The campus is located in the village of Nasrattin just a few miles away from where he was born and is now buried.



Figure 5 From the 4th MEMAGO Congress in Abu Dhabi, 2019. Love and knowledge increase by sharing. MEMAGO, Middle Eastern Mediterranean Association of Gynecologic Oncology.

time, I'd already concluded that I could not be as good as you). He constantly worked, studied, read, and wrote which caused the myth among his patients that he lost his mother to cancer, and this was his way of redemption.

A few months ago, we took him back to earth, to his eternal bed a few meters away from the ruins of his birthplace. A hot wind, cedars, junipers, crickets, his neighbors, students, and patients were there to say goodbye and entrust him to his mother. A clay-rich red soil became an eternal blanket for my always hot-loving father.

Ali's deeds have come to an end. It was a familiar human story. Ali was Marsel from Beirut, Hernando from Bogota, Nic from Kinshasa, Andrea from Santiago, or Rahma from Nairobi. He used to say 'Love and knowledge increase by sharing'. I hope his good deeds continue by way of his friends and colleagues sharing love and knowledge.

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