

Memorial tribute to Erdogan Atasoy M.D. (1930-2017)

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Erdogan Atasoy, both the son and the grandson of medical doctors, was born in Istanbul in the early 1930's. Experiencing the tragic death of his father, a general surgeon, when he was just a toddler, the young Atasoy was raised and put through school by his uncle and family, as was the custom in Turkish cultural tradition. He later completed his medical training at Istanbul University, graduating in April 1956.

Following the popular trend in those days in which young Turkish doctors were going to the United States to specialize, Atasoy started to work as an intern at Jefferson Hospital in Roanoke, Virginia in October 1956. One of his favorite stories about his experiences there was his fond remembrance of how a mother whom he had seen through childbirth had given her newborn son the middle name of Atasoy. Another memory he used to relate was how his ability to diagnose Behcet's Disease in a patient became a source of great excitement during his Internal Medicine rotation.

Atasoy's residency in surgery began at Duke University's Watts Hospital in Durham, North Carolina. He earned his general surgery assistantship after four years at Louisville University. After passing the American Board of Surgery exams, Dr. Erdogan Atasoy became a certified general surgeon in 1964.



Dr. Atasoy returned to Turkey that same year to fulfill his compulsory military service and completed his two-year military duty as a lieutenant at Ankara Mil-

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itary Hospital. It was during this period that he met and married his wife, Turkan.

Granted a "Green Card" at the end of 1966, Dr. Atasoy returned to Louisville University to engage in a one-year fellowship training program in Hand Surgery with Prof. Harold E. Kleinert, joining the group after Dr. Joseph E. Kutz.

In 1967, Atasoy performed what he described as the first "triangular volar flap," or "VY" flap procedure, on a child with multiple amputated fingertips. After many cases, Dr. Atasoy presented the surgery procedure at the January 1970 meeting in Chicago of the American Society for Surgery of the Hand. This presentation was published in the *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery* in July 1970. The procedure was later to be called "Atasoy's flap" [1].

I met Dr. Atasoy in July 1976. When I, as an orthopedic resident, invited my professors and their spouses to my home for dinner, I invited the Atasoy's too, but he came alone. He said that his wife had stayed home because she had to look after their young children (Erhan, Bilhan and Beyhan, ages 7-5-3 at the time).

He was an ardent football (soccer) fan. Though not too often, some of our gatherings took place thanks to football. In the 1970's, the very successful football coach Rinus Michels of the Netherlands, known as the "Best Coach of the 20th Century," had put together a theoretical framework he called "Total Football." Atasoy had purchased the entire series of cassettes on total football, and there was nothing he liked better than to watch the videos with us in his living room at home and talk about the intricacies of the game. Some days, we would play in the Atasoy's backyard with their sons. At other times, we would go to a football field and watch the newly popular soccer matches. Later on, Atasoy's younger son was to become a good midfield player. We would go out to the games in their Pontiac station wagon. Atasoy would tell me about all the features about the Pontiac, a car that he had been driving for years, and he never minded that the car had no air conditioning.

In 1979, I found the opportunity to work with Dr. Atasoy as a Hand Surgery fellow. He would start out on every operation with great precision, working as if on embroidery, doing everything by himself, right up to the last stitch and the application of the dressing. Instead of using a surgical loupe, he would use an old pair of minimalistic rimless glasses for magnification during his surgeries. He was a minimal talker outside of the operating room, but inside, he was always talking and explaining.

I assisted Atasoy in some of his first thoracic outlet syndrome (TOS), transaxillary first rib resection and transcervical scalenectomy procedures. Here too, he arranged everything himself--from positioning the patient preop to adjusting the lighting. He would make sure that tissues would be protected during surgery and he completed the procedures with almost no bleeding at all. Patients coming to the Hand Surgery office with TOS would immediately be referred to Atasoy [2]. I have a warm memory of the Holiday Season, around Christmas, when the bulletin board in the office featured a humorous drawing of the local Steakhouse, calling it the "Rib-eye Factory," along with a caricature of Atasoy with the quip, "Father of the Turks" written over it.

In later years, when the number of TOS surgery cases began to increase, Dr. Atasoy told me a story about how Prof. Morton Spinner from New York had referred a patient to him, a woman who had not benefited from treatment. The patient was obese so Dr. Atasoy recommended that she lose weight. The patient returned three months later after losing the weight and went through successful surgery. Dr. Atasoy later got a call from Dr. Spinner asking him to write an article for publication. Dr. Spinner must have been impressed with the outcome of the case!

Up until the time he retired in 2013, Dr. Atasoy authored 77 publications, including book chapters. His articles on the method of treatment for TOS are among the most innovative and memorable of his works. Additionally, the antenna procedure [3], reverse cross finger flap [4,5], scapulothoracic stabilization procedure

[6] and Osbourne ligament reconstruction to prevent ulnar nerve subluxation are Dr. Atasoy's well-known contributions to the literature [7].

Dr. Atasoy passed away on October 19, 2017. He left behind three beloved and competent children that he had raised as a single parent after the death of his wife in 1985. He will also be missed by his four grandchildren.

Dr. Erdogan Atasoy will always be remembered as an educator and a reliable friend and associate who can never be replaced.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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