

Letter to the Editor of IJBH

COVID-19: a Neurosurgeon's Personal Story of 2020

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On September 9-12, 2019, I traveled to Beijing, China for the World Congress of Neurosurgery. I was eager to attend the biggest event of my profession for two reasons. One was my nomination for second vice-president of the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies (WFNS). The second reason was to learn about Chinese culture for the first time in my life. I was honored to be elected for an officer position of the WFNS and I tremendously enjoyed the grandiosity of the Great Wall of China (Figure 1), the Forbidden City, and Summer Palace; I also enjoyed trying authentic Chinese food.



Figure 1. Visit to the Great Wall of China with My Esteemed Colleagues, Professors Ossama Al-mefty (Harvard University, Boston, MA) and Ugur Ture (Yeditepe University, Ankara, Turkey)

Little did I know that 700 miles away, in the city of

Wuhan, there was trouble brewing. Upon return home, we started hearing news about the COVID-19 virus and its spread across Wuhan, China and subsequent slow infiltration from Asia into Europe and beyond. I was devastated to see pictures, particularly from two countries (Iran and Italy) with overwhelmed hospitals and medical personnel, lack of personal protective equipment and respirators, cases of severe illness, and death in the thousands. The great oceans surrounding the United States initially seemed to be a protective cushion against the spread of the virus to my country. Suddenly, dreaded news from Seattle, WA emerged – the virus had arrived in the U.S. Still, the distance between Seattle, WA and my hometown, Memphis, TN, seemed to be a comfortable barrier.

In February 2020, I was invited give an honorary lecture dedicated to Professor Nurhan Avman in Ankara, Turkey (Figures 2 and 3). My colleagues from Turkey communicated that they are excited for my arrival and reassured me there were zero cases of COVID-19 in Turkey. Again, I visited Turkey, gave the lectures, and was mesmerized by the historical wonder of Cappadocia.

Figure 2.

Figure 3. Back in my home country, the virus spread like wildfire throughout the U.S., shortly arriving to Tennessee just upon my return. The state became overwhelmed and the governor initiated a stay-at-home executive order on April 2nd. Our neurosurgical program became limited to only emergency cases (Figure 4), while dozens and dozens of already scheduled elective surgeries had to be indefinitely postponed. My personal research revealed that there is no efficient strategy against the virus except for the following: wear a mask and eye shield/glasses, keep a distance, and frequently wash/disinfect your hands. I decided thereon that I would only wear N95 masks and will not take it off from the moment I leave my house to the moment I come back save for eating lunch in my office alone after thoroughly washing and disinfecting my hands. Surprisingly, in my practice, the number of overall operating cases remained the same as previous years although they were at times emergent cases. Needless to say, neurosurgical disease does not



Prof. Dr. Nurhan Avman

Prof. Dr. Nurhan Avman 1928 yılında "Köln'de doğdu. İlk ve orta öğrenimini köyde, ilköğrenimini İstanbul'da, liseyi İstanbul'da, üniversiteyi İstanbul'da yaptı. 1946 yılında İstanbul'da tıp fakültesi mezun oldu. 1947 yılında Amerika'ya göçtü ve ilk işi New York'ta "The Rockefeller Institute"de asistan oldu. 1952-1957 yılları arasında "Harvard Medical School"da 4 yıl nöroşirürji eğitimi yaptı. 1959 yılında "American Neurological Society"nin üyesi oldu. 1960 yılında "Harvard Medical School"da asistan oldu. 1968-1990 yılları arasında "Harvard Medical School"da asistan profesör ve asistan profesör olarak çalıştı. 1990 yılında "Harvard Medical School"da profesör olarak çalışmaya başladı. 1992 yılında "Ankara Üniversitesi"ne profesör olarak atıldı. 1993 yılında "Ankara Üniversitesi"ne profesör olarak atıldı. 1993 yılında "Ankara Üniversitesi"ne profesör olarak atıldı. 1993 yılında "Ankara Üniversitesi"ne profesör olarak atıldı.



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ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ
 TIP FAKÜLTESİ
 NÖROŞİRÜRJİ ANABİLİM DALI

XXXII.
**PROF. DR. NURHAN AVMAN
 KONGRESİ**
 Ali Kristht, M. D.

Superiority of Microsurgery in Basilar Arteriovenous
 Cavernous Sinus Hemangiomas and the future of
 Microsurgery
 AVM: New Concept (Anatomy of Pathology)
 Video Session: How to make the complex simple in microsurgery

Kenan Arnautovic, M. D., Ph.D.
 Pretemporal CO2 approach for microsurgical resection of
 sellar and parasellar lesions
 Microsurgical treatment of intramedullary spinal cord tumors.
 Microsurgical treatment of adult Chiari
 I malformations- lessons learned after 130 cases
 Anterior microsurgical cervical discectomy and instrumented fusion
 Combined microsurgical, endoscopic and
 neuro-navigation assisted resection of pituitary tumors

28 Şubat 2020, Cumartesi - Saat: 08:30
 Yer: İhni Sina Hastanesi Hasan Ali Yücel Konferans Salonu



Figures 2 and 3. Visiting Professorship in Ankara, Turkey (Left to Right: Professors Kristht, Caglar, Arnautovic and Dogan)



Figure 4. Operating with My Residents During COVID-19

discriminate against time or place. I continued to work hard despite the pandemic; every day, I psychologically encouraged myself to keep up the pace and remained focused.

Early on, our hospital installed a policy of testing every patient upon arrival to the hospital, especially in potentially operative conditions. Therefore, we were always fairly confident if a patient we were operating on had COVID. However, problems started to arise when people I worked closely with, such as my nurse, medical assistant, and nurse practitioner, who were all people that I had close contact with for a prolonged period of time, tested positive for COVID. Although both parties were protected with PPE in all instances, the risk was real. At first, I was anxious and frankly scared of getting COVID-19 after my exposures, but then, as time passed, it assured me that wearing PPE as religiously as I did and maintaining the aforementioned strategy seems to work. As time passed, I was assured more and more. Needless to say, I was tested a dozen times, every couple of weeks and remained negative so far. We continued to operate, and once restrictions were lifted, we were doing cases almost as pre-pandemic.

Personally, I grieved the loss of many colleagues, co-



COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card

Please keep this record card, which includes medical information about the vaccines you have received.
 Por favor, guarde esta tarjeta de registro, que incluye información médica sobre las vacunas que ha recibido.

ARNAUTOVIC KENAN
 Last Name First Name MI

Date of Birth: 6/6/1960 Patient number (medical record or IIS record number)

Vaccine	Product Name/Manufacturer	Date	Healthcare Professional or Clinic Site
1 st Dose COVID-19	Lot EV11085 exp 3/21 Pfizer	12/18/2020 mm dd yy	
2 nd Dose COVID-19		mm dd yy	
Other		mm dd yy	
Other		mm dd yy	

Figure 5. Receiving the first dose of the vaccine on December 18, 2020

workers, friends, and relatives. This extraordinary year has robbed me from the things I love the most – traveling, visiting with friends and family, and my social life. I did maintain some trace of social life by going to restaurants on Fridays and Saturdays with my wife under the appropriate precautions. The other escape to freedom was writing dozens of scientific publications that piled up on my desk for years and were waiting for the appropriate time to be completed. 2020 turned out to be the most productive publishing year of my life.

Furthermore, the medical and neurosurgical community bridged the lack of travel and in-person conferences with online lectures and seminars. I was honored to take part in Days of the Academy of Medical Sciences of Bosnia and Hercegovina in November 2020 under the leadership of Professor Izet Masic. I thoroughly enjoyed the presentations of Professors Kurjak, Masic, Sinanovic, Zildzic, Trnacevic, Mujanovic, Jankovic, and Donev (1-5).

And then, out of nowhere, expected, but surprising, a salvation came to the horizon. A vaccine for COVID-19 was released. It was quickly distributed throughout the U.S. First, Pfizer (New York, NY) on December 11, 2020 and Moderna (Cambridge, MA) on December 18, 2020. I was fortunate to be one of the first recipients of the Pfizer vaccine, receiving my first dose on December 18 (Figure 5). For 2 days, I felt soreness in my arm and feverish, although I did not have a fever. I am scheduled to get the

second dose on January 18 and feel much more confident now.

Taking vengeance against the disease, I decided to take a vacation with my family at Christmastime to Aspen, Colorado, one of my favorite skiing spots in the world. I sincerely hope 2021 will be the year we remember coming out of this nightmare. First, the world must be properly vaccinated to about 70%, providing herd immunity against this horrific virus and then we will see the light at the end of the tunnel.

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