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# SANS NEWSLETTER

The Official Newsletter of the Saudi  
Association of Neurological Surgery  
(SANS)



# MESSAGE FROM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Dear colleagues and members of SANS,

We begin this issue with a letter. Not a tribute. Not a lecture. A letter—from Dr. Maher Hassounah to the residents who will carry this specialty forward. No titles, no audience of peers. Just a surgeon who has walked the path, speaking directly to those just beginning it.

That spirit of passing something on continues throughout this issue: a tribute to Professor Imad Kanaan, whose legacy lives on in every leader his residents have become; Spinoscopy, advancing endoscopic spine surgery through hands-on training in Riyadh; and Dr. Abdulhadi Algahtani on his promotion to Associate Professor of Neurosurgery.

Honouring those who built us. Sharing knowledge that elevates us. Recognising the achievements that push us forward.

Thank you for being part of it.

**Dr. Khalid Siddiqui**

*Editor-in-Chief*

*The Editorial Team*

## FEATURE

## From the Retiree's Desk: Wisdom Passed Forward

**Editor's Note:** *In our previous issue, we had the privilege of honouring Dr. Maher Hassounah through the voices of his colleagues—surgeons who trained under him, operated beside him, and learned from his example. This month, Dr. Hassounah returns the favour. Not with a farewell, but with a gift: a personal letter of advice directed not to his peers, but to the residents who will carry this specialty forward. We give you the floor, Doctor. The residency is listening*

### Sparks For Your Fire

**By Dr. Maher Ibrahim Hassounah**

Former Consultant Neurosurgeon at King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Centre  
Riyadh



The neurosurgeon is the custodian of the human brain, with its cognitive and neurological abilities. Any intervention that leaves the patient trapped in a suboptimal body or mind is considered a failure of custody.

Looking back over 45 years of professional service, my perspective has changed from mastering neurosurgical techniques to understanding the entire philosophy of being a neurosurgeon. We choose neurosurgery as a path not merely for prestige, lifestyle, or financial reward; we choose it because, simply, we cannot imagine ourselves doing anything else.

It is our willingness to endure hardships and undertake tasks that involve risk or danger, accepting to walk throughout our career along an edge between functionality and disability, life and death, triumph and tragedy.

The elegance of neuroanatomy and neurophysiology, combined with the complexities of neurosurgical pathology and the aspiration to make a meaningful impact, is the primary element that attracts individuals to the field of neurosurgery.

## Sparks For Your Fire

*By Dr. Maher Hassounah*

### **A Distilled Counsel to my Younger Colleagues**

Entering the extraordinary field of neurosurgery marks the beginning of a journey that spans decades in the operating room, with both exhilarating and daunting moments, heavy nights, and profound responsibilities.

Working on a noble organ like the human brain demands supreme confidence in our knowledge and skills, courage, and humility. Every generation of neurosurgeons has been humbled when working on the brain. Once humility is ignored, the neurosurgeon becomes dangerous.

The brain is not a forgiving organ. A millimetre or less is the difference between a person's ability and disability, memory and amnesia, speech and silence, and between movement and paralysis.

Neurosurgery is a high-stakes specialty. You will inevitably lose patients despite having done everything right, just as you will save some you were certain you would lose. These paradoxes may never fully make sense, but our responsibility is to learn from them and keep moving forward.

**Here is comprehensive advice for neurosurgical trainees:**



## Sparks For Your Fire

By Dr. Maher Hassounah

### A. Clinical Acumen

- **Master neurosurgical anatomy:** *This covers classic neuroanatomy, gross neuroanatomy, and microsurgical neuroanatomy, including its surgical corridors and trajectories, white matter boundaries, and neuro-vasculature.*
- **The more you know, the better you are (Knowledge is Power):** *Master the pathophysiology and natural history of neurosurgical conditions. By coupling this with a broad understanding of neurological and systemic diseases, you will develop the clinical judgment necessary to make sound management decisions.*
- **Own Your Patients:** *You are the primary advocate for your patient. Know their labs, their hemodynamic status, and their neurological exam better than anybody else, including the attending consultant.*
- **Time is brain (5 minutes early is better than 1 minute late):** *In emergency neurosurgery, it is always better to intervene early, before a neurological deficit develops, than late, after it is established. Streamline the patient's path to the operating room by relentlessly eliminating all distractors and potential delays.*

### B. Surgical Craft

- **The hand is a faithful servant to the prepared mind:** *study the case the night before. Visualise the approach, the potential complications, and the exact steps of the procedure.*
- **Efficiency is an indicator of skillful hands; be innovative.** *You may echo your mentor or pioneer surgeons, but always remember to find better ways to be more economical in movements, resources, effort, and time—without haste—while nevertheless achieving the same good results.*
- **Ergonomics:** *Learn to operate with proper posture, handle tissue and instruments neatly, and utilise the microscope comfortably. These measures decrease fatigue and reflect well on the image of the neurosurgeon. Do not forget to think about the next move ahead of time and avoid unnecessary pauses or wasting time during the procedure.*
- **Know your limits and accept technical humility:** *Acknowledge when you are in a situation that is difficult for you to handle. A trainee who knows when to stop or ask for*

## Sparks For Your Fire

By Dr. Maher Hassounah

*help is a safer surgeon than one who tries to "muscle through."*

- **Avoid complications or suboptimal results:** A neurosurgeon's responsibility in the operating room begins the moment the patient enters the theatre and continues until they depart. To prevent complications and ensure optimal outcomes, every step must be deliberate—from safety checks and anaesthesia induction to meticulous positioning and final closure.

However, one must also recognise when "good enough is better than perfect." Chasing the final millimetre of a tumour has arguably harmed more patients than it has helped.

Regarding wound closure, it is important to acknowledge that patients often prioritise the aesthetic outcome as much as, if not more than, the functional success of the surgery.

### C. Cultivating Physical and Mental Stamina

- **Neurosurgery is an endurance profession.** Both trainees and experienced neurosurgeons must possess the stamina to operate for long hours and the ability to wake in the middle of the night, instantly

regaining the mental acuity required to make sound judgments and handle emergent cases safely. Furthermore, one must be able to complete the following day's schedule as planned, regardless of fatigue or sleep deprivation.

- **Protect your body and mental health:** get enough sleep when you can, eat properly, exercise regularly, and stay fit.
- **Managing the "Second Victim Syndrome":** When things go downhill, learn to process grief without letting it affect your confidence, judgment, and performance. Develop emotional resilience but maintain empathy.

### D. Professionalism and Communication

- **Respect begets respect:** Treat other professionals with the highest level of respect; if you disrespect them, your life will become exponentially harder.
- **Actions speak louder than words.** Strive to be reliable: always fulfill your commitments and perform tasks to the standard expected of you. Avoid negligence and unresponsiveness; half measures are never sufficient. Reliability is a

## Sparks For Your Fire

*By Dr. Maher Hassounah*

hallmark of a neurosurgeon's character, as it builds a lasting reputation that commands both trust and respect.

- **If you treat a disease, you might win or lose. But if you treat a person, you always win. (Building Rapport):** When managing complex or life-altering conditions, establishing a strong, empathetic alliance with the patient and their loved ones ensures better understanding, lessens anxiety, builds trust, and mitigates litigation risk.
- **Proficiency in the English language:** Proficiency in English is a cornerstone of excellence in modern medical training and practice. It serves as the essential medium for clinical communication, professional presentations, research publications, and administrative documentation. Mastering the language not only ensures clarity but also creates a favourable impression among colleagues, patients, and mentors alike.

Given the critical role of these skills, I firmly believe that passing a rigorous

English proficiency test, such as the IELTS or TOEFL, should be a prerequisite for entry into neurosurgery training.

## **E. Academic & Career Development**

- **Seek a mentor, not merely a boss:** A true mentor teaches you, facilitates your professional independence, and cares about your career trajectory rather than viewing you solely as a source of clinical labor.
- **Indulge in research and create a portfolio:** Start documenting your cases, your research, and your teaching efforts early. When building a good curriculum vitae (CV), ensure your contributions to the field are documented from day one.
- **Learning is a lifelong journey:** always be a learner. The moment you think you know everything about a specific topic or procedure is the moment your growth stops and your risk of causing harm begins.

**The field needs you—go be excellent. Wishing each of you a distinguished and meaningful career ahead**

## COMMUNITY MILESTONES

### MORE THAN A TEACHER:

#### A Personal Tribute To Prof. Imad Kanaan



*A pioneer in neurosurgery, a devoted educator, and one of the most decorated surgeons our region has produced, Professor Imad Kanaan has shaped not only the field but the people within it. As he steps into retirement, one of his former residents felt compelled to share this personal reflection—not on the titles and honours he earned, but on the lives he built along the way.*



## FROM A COLLEAGUE'S HEART: A Personal Tribute To Prof. Imad Kanaan



By **Dr. Homoud AlDahash**

Consultant Neurosurgeon

King Faisal Specialist Hospital & Research Centre

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Professor Kanaan is, without question, one of the most distinguished neurosurgeons our region has produced. In 2015, he was recognised among the world's top 16 neurosurgeons.

I am not sure I would be where I am today without Professor Imad Kanaan.

I came to him as an uncertain resident, still learning and making mistakes. He did not just teach me neurosurgery; he believed in me when I was not yet sure I believed in myself. He stayed with me through difficult cases, hard moments, and long nights. He pushed me when I needed encouragement and steadied me when I needed support. When I finally became a consultant, I knew that much of what I had become professionally was shaped by him. The journey from a resident finding his footing to a consultant neurosurgeon would not have been the same without him walking alongside me.

But my story is not unique. That is perhaps the most extraordinary thing about Professor Kanaan. Look around

the field of neurosurgery today—across the Kingdom, the region, and the world—and you will find his former residents and fellows. They are department heads, program directors, and consultants leading teams, training the next generation, and building services from the ground up. These men and women came to him early in their careers, rough around the edges and full of potential they had not yet learned to trust. He recognised that potential in them before they saw it in themselves.

That is a rare gift. Many great surgeons can operate, but far fewer can look at a young resident in the middle of a difficult case and know exactly what that person needs—whether it is a firm correction, a quiet word of encouragement, or simply the confidence that comes from being trusted to make a decision. Professor Kanaan possessed that gift. He used it generously and without keeping score. He invested in people not because it was his job, but because he genuinely cared about what they would become.





## FROM A COLLEAGUE'S HEART: A Personal Tribute To Prof. Imad Kanaan

The leaders he shaped are now shaping others. The lessons he passed on are being passed on again. That is how a true legacy works: it does not remain in one place; it multiplies.

Prof. Kanaan has received the KFSH&RC Diamond Award for Innovation and Patient Care, as well as the Gold Medal from the Saudi Association of Neurological Surgery. These are not small honours; they represent a career of sustained excellence recognised by the highest levels of the profession both nationally and internationally.

And yet—and I mean this sincerely—none of that is what made him exceptional to those of us who trained under him.

What made him exceptional was his consistent presence every single day. He treated the most anxious patient with the same patience he extended to the most complex case. He never made a junior colleague feel small for asking a question. He could walk into a tense situation and bring calm simply by being present. He upheld high standards without making you feel crushed when you fell short. He corrected you and then helped you do

better. That is harder than it sounds, yet he made it look effortless.

There is a particular kind of doctor whom patients remember long after they have left the hospital—not just because of the medical care they received, but because of how they were made to feel: seen, heard, and cared for as a person, not merely as a diagnosis. Professor Kanaan was that kind of doctor. Families who came to him in their most frightening moments left feeling that someone was truly in their corner. This is not something that can be taught in a lecture; it comes from character. And from everything I witnessed, his character was exceptional.

Retirement marks the end of a formal chapter. However, the truth is that Professor Kanaan's work does not retire with him. It lives on in the wards and operating theatres, in the departments led by those he trained, in the patients who recovered because of his skill and care, and in the residents currently being mentored by consultants who were once shaped by him.

## FROM A COLLEAGUE'S HEART: A Personal Tribute To Prof. Imad Kanaan

Professor Kanaan, on behalf of your residents—those who are now consultants, department heads, and leaders in neurosurgery across the world—I thank you. Thank you not only for teaching us the science but also for showing us what it means to practice medicine with integrity, humility, and genuine compassion for the people in your care.

Thank you for investing in us while we were still growing. Thank you for holding us to a standard that made us better than we ever thought we could be. You did not just build a career; you built people. And those people are building others.



*Some careers are defined by milestones. Others are measured by the lives they touch. Professor Imad Kanaan's career has been measured by both. That is a legacy that never retires*

## EDUCATION & TRAINING

### Neurosurgery in Saudi Arabia: SPINOSCOPY: Advancing Endoscopic Spine Surgery Education in Saudi Arabia



By Dr.Dhawi Alotaibi  
Spine Surgery Consultant  
King Fahad Medical City | Riyadh

**We are proud to announce the successful completion of Spinoscopy, a specialised cadaveric endoscopic spine surgery course held at the Simulation Centre of King Fahd Medical City in Riyadh.**

The course brought together 23 spine surgeons who shared a common interest in advancing endoscopic spine surgery. It offered focused, hands-on cadaveric training in both monoportal and biportal endoscopic spine surgery techniques, including Unilateral Biportal Endoscopy (UBE).

The primary aim of Spinoscopy was to bridge the gap between theoretical

knowledge and practical surgical skills through structured, anatomy-based training. Guided demonstrations and supervised hands-on sessions introduced participants to essential endoscopic principles, relevant anatomical landmarks, safe surgical access corridors, and technical tips applicable to modern endoscopic spine surgery. Spinoscopy was developed as an educational platform dedicated to advancing endoscopic spine surgery through structured training, practical skill development, knowledge exchange, and collaboration.



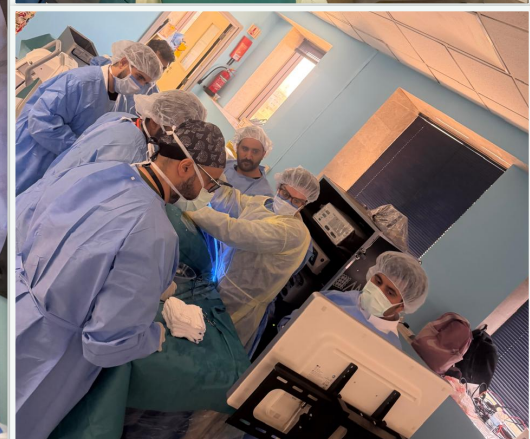
## SPINOSCOPY: Advancing Endoscopic Spine Surgery Education in Saudi Arabia

The course brought together national and international faculty, participants, and organisers, reflecting the increasing interest in endoscopic spine surgery within the Kingdom.

The development of this platform represents a significant step toward enhancing specialised surgical education, facilitating technology transfer, and cultivating advanced local expertise. It also creates opportunities for ongoing collaboration and the development of future educational initiatives in endoscopic spine surgery. We are grateful to all faculty members, participants, and members of the organising team for their dedication and valuable contributions. Their

enthusiasm and commitment were essential to the success of the course and helped establish Spinoscopy as a significant educational platform for endoscopic spine surgery in Saudi Arabia.

The establishment of Spinoscopy reflects the global adoption of structured endoscopic spine surgery training and practice. It demonstrates a commitment to advancing the field through organised education, hands-on skill development, and the ongoing exchange of knowledge and expertise.





## SANS NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### DR. ABDULHADI ALGAHTANI PROMOTED TO ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF NEUROSURGERY

Dr. Abdulhadi Algahtani, MD, FRCS(SN), FEBNS, has been promoted to Associate Professor of Neurosurgery at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences - Ministry of National Guard Health Affairs.

Dr. Algahtani also serves as OR Director of Operative Services at King Abdulaziz Medical City - Jeddah, home to a state-of-the-art neuroscience and trauma center. The center delivers advanced care supported by intraoperative MRI, navigation, neurophysiology, and robotic systems, as well as endoscopic and fluoroscopic capabilities for complex spine procedures. It is also the only center on the West Coast offering awake craniotomy and awake spine surgery, alongside sophisticated neurocritical care.

"I am grateful to our leadership and exceptional teams," said Dr. Algahtani. "I remain committed to excellence in patient care, education, and innovation."

*Please join us in congratulating Dr. Algahtani on this well-deserved achievement.*





## Upcoming Events

The poster features a light blue background with a subtle pattern of white and blue lines resembling a brain's neural network. At the top, there are three logos: the Tunisian Ministry of Health (Ministère de la Santé) on the left, the Tunisian Association of Neurosurgery (Association Tunisienne de Neurochirurgie) in the center, and the Pan Arab Neurosurgical Society on the right. The main title is prominently displayed in the center: "15<sup>th</sup> PANARAB NEUROSURGICAL SOCIETY CONFERENCE". Below this, the text "39<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Tunisian Association of Neurosurgery" is written. The dates "November 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> 2026" and the location "Russelior Hotel - Yasmine Hammamet - TUNISIA" are listed. At the bottom, there is a photograph of the Bab el Bhar (Sea Gate) in Hammamet, Tunisia, with its ornate arches and minaret. The bottom of the poster includes contact information for Pr MEHDI DARMOUL, including an email address and a website URL.

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**15<sup>th</sup> PANARAB  
NEUROSURGICAL  
SOCIETY CONFERENCE**

**39<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Tunisian  
Association of Neurosurgery**

**November 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> 2026**  
**Russelior Hotel - Yasmine Hammamet - TUNISIA**

Pr MEHDI DARMOUL  
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## Upcoming Events

6<sup>th</sup> Continental African Congress of Neurosurgery  
34<sup>th</sup> Moroccan Congress of Neurosurgery  
14<sup>th</sup> WFNS Rabat Reference Center Course for African Neurosurgeons

**CAANS**  
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