Dr Ümit Demirel, dental surgeon and physiologist of Istanbul University, Turkey, passed away in his home on 11th November 2014, at the age of 53, due to a cardiovascular problem. He is survived by his younger sister, elder brother, and family. The family found him dead in the evening in front of the TV which was switched on.

Ümit, as we called him, visited the Fluorosis Foundation of India in New Delhi on two occasions during 2008 and 2014 and, due to his very keen desire to be in the forefront of fluorosis research and to develop the fields of medical geology and fluorosis in Turkey, we developed a strong liking for his selfless efforts.

Ümit initially visited and worked with the scientists in the Foundation for two weeks from 5th to 20th February 2008. He accompanied our team to Aditya Birla’s Hindustan Aluminium Company (Hindalco) where we were involved in assessing and monitoring the health of the smelter workers, so that they did not become victims of industrial fluorosis. During our short-term stay in the industrial establishment, he visited a school on campus in the village of Renukoot in Sohenbadra District in Uttar Pradesh to assess the prevalence of dental fluorosis (DF) in Class III and IV students.

Dr Ümit Demirel with school children in Renukoot, Uttar Pradesh in 2008.
He scanned 147 children in a day in the two classes and separated the children with DF from those students without it. He then examined the children further and graded the DF according to Dean’s Index. DF was present in 18 girls and 28 in boys giving prevalences of 12% and 19% respectively. He submitted a report on the DF prevalence in the Class III & IV students in the school to the management of the industry with a copy to the Principal of the school, Dr TK Chowdhary. His efforts were greatly appreciated.

Ümit, was, I believe, visiting an aluminium industry for the first time and he witnessed how the smelter workers were addressed to mitigate their health complaints. He said “This is a big learning experience for me”. There is one aluminium smelter in Turkey and he planned to set-up a laboratory focussing on fluoride toxicity and fluorosis prevention in Turkey.

During his visit to New Delhi, he visited and held discussions with Dr Naseem Shah, Chief of the Centre for Dental Education and Research at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi.

In August 2008, he attended the XXIXth Conference of the International Society for Fluoride Research, organized by Dr Hardy Limeback of the Department of Dentistry, University of Toronto, Canada, and made a presentation on fluorosis in Turkey.

Ümit realized that although fluorosis was a prevalent problem in Turkey there were no publications correlating the presence of fluoride minerals in the geological crust, the distribution of water contaminated with fluoride, and the occurrence of fluorosis in Turkey. He often mentioned that he had to work against many odds to set right the fluorosis problems arising from excess fluoride ingestion in his own country. On his return to Turkey, after the visit to India, he submitted a report to Istanbul University, his Alma Mater, and to the Fluorosis Foundation of India, New Delhi, in which he said,

"Professor Susheela provided advice and suggestions related to studies on fluorosis in Turkey. She emphasized that research in fluoride and fluorosis must go on, irrespective of vested interests. Those victims afflicted with fluorosis need to be taken care of. The most serious damage is inflicted on pregnant women and infants. Promoting fluoride in
toothpaste and water, and administering fluoride to children, in the name of the prevention of dental caries and cavity formation, are outdated, unscientific, and unethical concepts. These practices have no place in a modern society which is striving hard to achieve good health. This was very valuable and important for me for getting better organized and I respect her advice.”

In 2013, he attended the XXXIst Conference of the ISFR, organized by Dr Amir Hossein Mahvi, Centre for Air Pollution Research, Institute for Environment Research, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran, and gave a keynote address entitled “Are we aware of the fluorosis problem in our countries, including Turkey?”

Dr Ümit at the XXIXth ISFR Conference in Toronto, Canada in August 2008 (with his arms outstretched and wearing a cap at the left end of the back row).

Dr Ümit at the XXXst ISFR Conference in Tehran, Iran, in October 2013 (at the right end of the back row)
During September 2014, Ümit, made a second visit to New Delhi, to participate in the Federation Dentaire Internationale (FDI) Annual World Dental Congress in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, the adjoining state to New Delhi. Ümit made a poster presentation entitled “Media, health and an approach to lesser known diseases within the context of the fluorosis problem in Turkey”. After the Congress, he spent a few days in the Fluorosis Foundation of India, New Delhi, discussing issues in his professional activities.

He had by then published a few scientific papers and his thoughts and ideas were appreciated by those who matter in policy formulation in the medical and health sciences in Turkey. That in itself revealed that his persistent efforts to make progress in fluorosis research in Turkey were beginning to make a mark. Ümit, unfortunately had a very short life, with his dreams left unfulfilled. The University of Istanbul has lost a very valuable scientist with a vision for doing good for the people of his own country. Ümit’s untimely death is a great loss to his family and friends across many nations.

Professor Emeritus AK Susheela
Fluorosis Research & Rural Development Foundation, Delhi, India

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS ON FLUOROSIS BY ÜMIT DEMIREL 2008–2014)

5 Demirel Ü. Media, health and an approach to lesser known diseases within the context of the fluorosis problem in Turkey [poster presentation P603]. Proceedings of 2014 FDI Annual World Dental Congress; 2014 Sep 11-14; Greater Noida, NCR (National Capital Region) New Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, India. p.349.