Journal of Korean Society of
Spine Surgery

In Memoriam: Professor Nam-Hyun Kim, MD, PhD (1935–2025)

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J Korean Soc Spine Surg 2026 Mar;33(1)1-4.
Originally published online March 31, 2026;
https://doi.org/10.4184/jkss.2026.33.1.1

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pISSN 2093-4378 eISSN 2093-4386

J Korean Soc Spine Surg. 2026 Mar;33(1):1-4. https://doi.org/10.4184/jkss.2026.33.1.1

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Professor Nam-Hyun Kim was a pioneering educator, clinician, and academic leader whose lifelong dedication profoundly shaped the development of orthopaedic surgery in Korea, particularly in the field of spine surgery. His scholarly vision and leadership laid the institutional and academic foundations of Korean spine surgery, and his legacy continues to influence generations of surgeons and researchers.

Professor Kim was born on January 5, 1935, in Chaam-dong, Cheonan, Chungcheongnam-do, Korea. He graduated with distinction from Yongsan High School in 1955 and entered Yonsei University College of Medicine the same year. After completing his residency training in the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at Severance Hospital from 1961 to 1965, he obtained board certification in orthopaedic surgery. He subsequently served as a military surgeon in the Republic of Korea Army, holding the rank of Major and providing medical service at institutions including the 77th Army Hospital in Gwangju. In September 1973, he earned his PhD in medicine, establishing a strong academic foundation for his future scholarly career (Fig. 1).

Professor Kim began his academic appointment as a full-time instructor at Yonsei University College of Medicine in 1970. His pursuit of advanced international training included clinical and academic experiences in Hong Kong during the early 1970s under Dr. Yau, as well as specialized training in Germany under Dr. Smith. These international experiences broadened his academic perspective and facilitated the introduction of advanced concepts in spine surgery to Korea. He was promoted to full professor in 1980 and remained on the faculty until his retirement in 2000, dedicating himself to

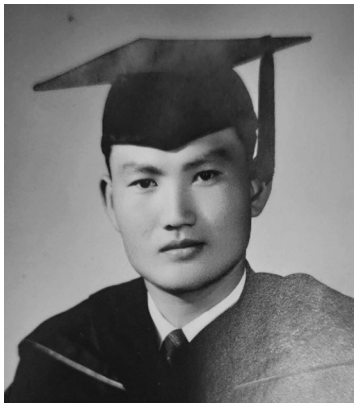

Fig. 1. Graduation portrait of Professor Nam-Hyun Kim, MD, PhD, from Yonsei University College of Medicine.

Key words: In memoriam, Spine surgery, Korean society of spine surgery, Academic leadership, Legacy

Received: January 26, 2026
Revised: February 3, 2026
Accepted: February 22, 2026
Published Online: March 31, 2026
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Fig. 2. Retirement ceremony photograph of Professor Nam-Hyun Kim, MD, PhD, with faculty members of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Yonsei University College of Medicine.

medical education, clinical excellence, and academic research (Fig. 2).

Beyond his academic responsibilities, Professor Kim played a central role in institutional leadership. He served as the founding Chair of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at Yongdong Severance Hospital, as Vice Director of Severance Hospital, and as Chair of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at Yonsei University College of Medicine. Through these roles, he contributed significantly to the establishment of structured clinical systems, the advancement of patient care, and the strengthening of academic governance.

Professor Kim served as President of the Korean Orthopaedic Association, further contributing to the advancement of orthopaedic surgery at the national level. His leadership in professional societies fostered academic collaboration, strengthened educational standards, and promoted international exchange. Notably, he was the first Korean member of the International Society for the Study of the Lumbar Spine (ISSLS), marking an important milestone in the international recognition of Korean spine surgery.

Professor Kim was a central figure in establishing spine surgery as an independent academic discipline in Korea. Through his influential publication in Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research, "A Computed Tomographic Analysis of Changes in the Spinal Canal After Anterior Lumbar Interbody Fusion," he provided early radiologic evidence of postoperative spinal canal remodeling, offering empirical support for the concept of indirect decompression (Fig. 3).[1] He also published an important article regarding morphometry of the pedicle of

A Computed Tomographic Analysis of Changes in the Spinal Canal After Anterior Lumbar Interbody Fusion

NAM HYUN KIM, M.D.,* HYUN KON KIM, M.D.,* AND JIN SUCK SUH, M.D.**

Thirteen patients with spondylolisthesis (six isthmic type and seven degenerative type) and ten patients with intervertebral disk herniation were treated by anterior lumbar interbody fusion. Preoperative and postoperative computed tomography (CT) scans were performed for each patient, and changes in anteroposterior (AP) diameter and lateral diameter of the dural sac, the area of the dural sac, and the amount of disk bulging were measured. The periodic tomogram was done in all patients postoperatively, and one- and two-year fusion rates were calculated. The calculations were compared with the early and late clinical results. The early clinical results after operation were excellent in 26.1%, good in 56.5%, and fair in 17.4%. The late clinical results were similar to early results. The early clinical results correlated with the changes in the spinal canal, such as an increase in AP diameter of the dural sac and a decrease in amount of disk bulging after anterior interbody fusion. There was statistical correlation between the early clinical results and the change in AP diameter of the dural sac. But the late clinical results were influenced by multiple factors including solid bony fusion.

Anterior lumbar interbody fusion used in spondylolisthesis and intervertebral disk herniation has several advantages, including an excellent bony fusion rate, maintenance of stability and normal height of disk space, wide removal of the degenerated intervertebral disk, no damage to the spinal cord and nerve root, and early ambulation. It is impossible to analyze the changes within the spinal canal after anterior interbody fusion with a conventional plain roentgenogram or tomogram. Therefore, the authors performed preoperative and postoperative computed tomography (CT) scans in patients with spondylolisthesis and intervertebral disk herniation treated by the anterior interbody fusion technique. Then the changes in the CT scan, such as anteroposterior (AP) and lateral diameter of the dural sac, the area of the dural sac and the amount of disk bulging were measured and compared, respectively, with the three-month and one-year postoperative clinical results. In addition, the fusion rate at one year was compared with one-year clinical results, and the periodic changes of the grade of clinical results and patient's symptoms were analyzed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

From July 1985 until February 1989, the authors performed anterior interbody fusion in ten patients with intervertebral disk herniation and 13 patients with spondylolisthesis. The average follow-up period was 17.6 months (range, 12–35 months). Patient age ranged from 19 to 60 years (average, 41.2 years). Twelve patients were women and 11 patients were men. Of the 13 spondylolisthesis patients, six cases were the isthmic type

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Received: July 24, 1990.
Revised: April 29, 1991.
Accepted: April 29, 1991.

Fig. 3. First page of the article "A Computed Tomographic Analysis of Changes in the Spinal Canal After Anterior Lumbar Interbody Fusion," published in Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research in 1993.

thoracic and lumbar vertebrae in Koreans to provide guidelines of developing pedicle screws suitable for Far East Asians[2] and through morphometric study of lumbar spinal canal, he suggested a new criteria for the diagnosis of lumbar spinal stenosis in Korean population.[3] On the other hand, he always emphasized the importance of basic research in orthopedic field and published an article about purification of bone morphogenetic protein and its application to bone defect in an animal model for the first time in Korea.[4,5] He was one of the two founding members of the Korean Society of Spine Surgery and led the establishment of its official academic journal, creating a formal platform for scholarly communication and research dissemination in the field of spine surgery. As the author of the foreword in the inaugural issue of the Journal of Korean Society of Spine Surgery, he articulated the academic vision, purpose, and future direction of the society, thereby laying the intellectual and institutional foundation for organized spine research and education in Korea (Fig. 4).[2] He

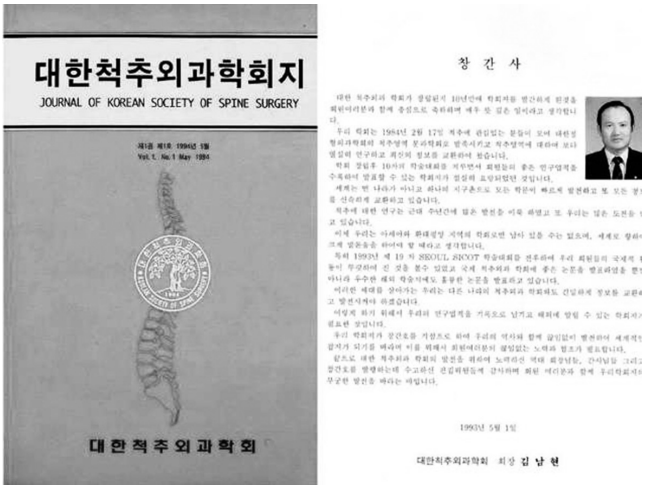

Fig. 4. Foreword authored by Professor Nam-Hyun Kim in the inaugural issue (Vol. 1, No. 1) of the Journal of Korean Society of Spine Surgery, published in 1994.

served the society as Secretary General for four years and later as President, contributing substantially to its organizational stability and academic growth. In recognition of his lifelong service, he was appointed Honorary President of the society.

Professor Kim was also instrumental in fostering collaborative academic culture within Severance Hospital. He founded the Severance Spine Society, creating an organized platform for academic discussion, clinical collaboration, and spine research. This society significantly contributed to the advancement of spine surgery and research at Severance and beyond. From its inception, the society steadily expanded and has grown into a large and active academic community, with 93 current members actively engaged in clinical practice, research, and education. The enduring vitality of this society reflects Professor Kim's vision for collective scholarship and mentorship.

Beyond medicine and academia, Professor Kim was deeply committed to faith and community service. As a devoted elder of Jeongdong Presbyterian Church, he faithfully served the church and its congregation for many years. His life reflected a strong sense of ethical responsibility, humility, and service—values that guided not only his medical career but also his personal conduct and relationships. His dedication to the church exemplified his belief in service beyond professional achievement and left a lasting impression on those who knew him both inside and outside the hospital.

Following his retirement from Yonsei University in 2000, Professor Kim continued his academic and clinical service as a Distinguished Professor at Konyang University College of Medicine from 2000 to 2006. Even after formal retirement, he remained actively engaged in patient care and medical education, exemplifying a lifelong commitment to medicine and mentorship.

Over more than three decades, Professor Nam-Hyun Kim devoted his life to clinical practice, research, education, professional leadership, and community service. His academic achievements, institutional leadership, and dedication to the advancement of spine surgery inspired countless trainees and colleagues. His name and legacy will remain deeply embedded in the history of Korean orthopaedic and spine surgery, and his spirit of integrity, scholarship, and service will continue to guide future generations.

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Acknowledgments

† *Professor Nam-Hyun Kim also mentored numerous master's and doctoral students throughout his academic career. His graduate trainees include the following:*

Master's degree recipients:

Gun-Sung Hwang, Jun-Soon Kang, Jin-Hong Park, Sung-Soo Kim, Ik-Hwan Yang, Dong-Bae Shin, Jin-Woo Lee, Nam-Hong Choi, Ye-Yeon Won, Hyun-Woo Kim, Kyung-Soo Suk, Tae-Yong Koo.

Doctoral degree recipients:

Ho-Jung Kang, Kyu-Hyun Yang, Yeo-Heon Yoon, Hwan-Mo Lee, In-Kook Song, Byung-Hyun Min, Yoon-Tae Lee, Eui-Hwan Ahn, Seok-Beom Lee, Sung-Soo Kim, Jun-Soon Kang, Ik-Hwan Yang, Jong-Hyuk Choi, Jin-Woo Lee, Dong-Bae Shin, Nam-Hong Choi.

† *The Severance Spine Society comprises the following members, whose collective dedication to clinical excellence, education, and research has continuously advanced the field of spine surgery:*

Heui-Jeon Park, Hwan-Mo Lee, Dong-Jun Kim, Hak-Sun Kim, Chang-Hoon Jeon, Hyun-Gon Kim, Dong-Eun Shin, Seok-Woo Kim, Seong-Hwan Moon, Young-Sang Lee, Joong-Won Ha, Yung Park, Kyung-Soo Suk, Jin-Oh Park, In-Gu Kim, Moon-Soo Park, Jun-Seok Son, Yong-Chan Kim, Hyung-Gyu Kim, Hyung-Joon Kim, Dong-Jun Shim, Hyung-Chan Kim, Jae-Man Lee, Nam-Su Chung, Si-Young Park, Joo-Young Kim, Tae-Hwan Kim, Ho-Joong Kim, Jeong-Ho Seo, Bo-Ram Kim, Wan-Ki Kim, Jin-Young Kim, Do-Yeon Kim, Jae-Woo Lim, Hyon-Su Chong, Byung-Ho Lee, Hyoung-Bok Kim, Seung-Hwan Lee, Ki-Youn Kwon, Jae-Ho Yang, Chul-Hyun Ki, Seong-Yeop Jin, Seong-Hwan Hong, Tae-Hyun Kim, Sung-Jin Park, Gil-Hyung Lee, Jae-Chul Lee, Han-Dong Lee, Sang-Youn Lim, Seung-Jin Choi, Ji-Won Kwon, Kun-Bo Park, Sang-Jun Park, Ji-Young Park, Sahyun Sung, Soo-Bin Lee, Chang-Uk Lee, Sun-Kyu Kim, Ji-Hyeon Kim, Sub-Ri Park, Jae-Won Shin, Jeong-Seok Yu, Nam-Hoo Kim, Joon-Oh Seo, Nam-Gyu Eom, Ja-Yeong Yoon, Hee-Woong Chung, Tae-Yup Kim, Chi-Hoon Ahn, Dong-Chan Eun, Yong-Ho Lee, Jun-Han Kwon, Sang-Ho Kim, Young-Hyun Yoon, Goo-Yeon Lee, Woo-Seok Jung, Han-Bin Jin, Sung-Ryul Choi, Tae-Jeong Park, Yong-June Suk, Kwang-Sik Eum, Dong-Hee Ye, Soo-Hyun Oh, Jae-Nam Lee, Weon-Min Cho, Hyun-Ik Cho, Chan-Woo Kim, Hee-Soo Kim, Tae-Ho Oh, and Chang-Geun Yu.