

The Finnish 'Hands-on' Experience

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Twenty-four hundred years ago, the respected healer, Hippocrates emphasised to his students, 'First of all, do no harm'.

Complications in hand therapy consist of those that are created for us and those that we create. Surgery of the hand because of its complexity, brings to bear firm principles and techniques. Every therapist involved with the treatment of the hand, must understand and employ these principles. Problems and complications may be prevented when a team approach to the treatment of the hand is undertaken by surgeons and therapists.

The 3rd International Congress of the International Federation of Societies of Hand Therapists was held concurrently with the 6th Congress of the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand in Finland, (June 1995) to promote the unrestricted, complete and latest knowledge amongst the participants.

Due to my involvement in all hand therapy programmes being administered at St. Luke's Hospital, and my regular correspondence with various Hand Therapy Associations overseas, I was asked by the Scientific Committee of the Hand Therapy Congress to chair a session with the title 'Hand Burns'.

Plenary sessions were usually addressed by distinguished figures in hand therapy and hand surgery (including James Hunter, Evelyn J. Mackin and Elaine Fess), whilst afternoon sessions were devoted to free papers i.e. 10 minute presentations relating to the main theme e.g. The Rheumatoid Hand, Nerve Injuries/Compressions, Ergonomics and Return to work.

The chairing of my Plenary Session consisted of five consecutive speakers followed by a discussion. Our first invited speaker was supposed to be N. Vytialingham, from Malaysia who unfortunately could not make it to the congress due to a medical problem. This did not alter the sequence of the day as his replacement, Mr. Jang Meng from Singapore delivered his paper.

The most innovative presentation in my session was called 'The Silicone Glove' presented by E. Van der Kerchove from Belgium. This audio-visual presentation explored the therapeutic treatment of a lady with severe third degree burns in both hands. It dealt with the personal experiences of all regimes that had been tried out to treat the scars and restore hand function, including Silicone Gloves. These gloves which were still being tested on a limited study group, seemed to offer great benefits against hypertrophic scarring whilst still allowing a high level of functional independence.

The range of subjects tackled in the rest of the other congress sessions varied from purely scientific and research based papers, such as 'A Comparative Study on the Functional Range of Motion on the Normal and Rheumatoid Hand' to more practical treatment techniques such as 'What makes treatment of RSD successful'.

A paper presented by a Swiss and a German therapist interested all professionals working within the hand rehab setting. They proposed a European based course of studies leading to a formally recognised qualification.

Apart from the formal presentations, one could also browse through a commercial and technical exhibition promoting hand rehabilitation products, (including various computerised hand evaluation systems).

All work and no play makes Jack a dull

boy! Apart from the scientific programme, the organising committee made sure (at a murderously expensive price) that all the international participants would leave the country with a clear idea of Finnish customs; food and drink, traditional music, and the famous sauna tradition by planning different evening events.

Following the congress programme, I was invited to attend the Council Meeting of the International Federation of Societies for Hand Therapy. After the committee member's reports, issues such as publications, pioneers of hand therapy award, progress report for the 4th IFSHT (to be held in

Vancouver) and applications of new members were discussed.

After some discussion by committee members, Malta was welcomed as a corresponding member. Full membership is only possible if a local hand therapy association is set up. Any one interested in such a venture is welcome to contact me.

This meeting brought the successful congress to an end. My thanks to the organising committee who worked incessantly for 3 years creating such an exciting and interesting experience.