

Seeing Congenital Hand Differences through a Global Lens

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The 2023 World Symposium of Congenital Malformations of the Hand and Upper Limb (WCS 2023) was a much-anticipated global gathering, that brought together leading clinicians, scientists, trainees, and other healthcare professionals with special interest in congenital hand differences. I had the pleasure and privilege of attending the conference in-person in the beautiful city of Minneapolis, through the support of IFSSH. The program included a diverse range of topics that catered to every level of interest and involvement in congenital upper limb conditions. The conference also highlighted interdisciplinary collaboration, and patient empowerment across different cultural backgrounds.

Pre-Course

Parallel pre-course workshops offered more specific topics and some with hands-on learning, allowing participants to explore evolving issues like patient outcomes and emerging strategies and technologies. I attended the course on Outcomes and Registries for Hand and Upper Limb Differences. The talks and discussions provided more intimate interactions with world experts, a rare opportunity even in the usual global hand meetings.

Welcome Reception

This was followed by a reception in the beautiful home of Dr. Ann Van Heest. The bus rides to and from gave me time to meet other international scholars and faculty. Being at a social event with the greats of congenital hand was a truly awesome experience and gave me the opportunity to personally meet and chat with names I only knew from reading and citing their work.



Figure 1. International scholars and delegate with our reception host, Dr. Ann Van Heest, Dr. Komla Sena Amouzou (Togo) Dr. Mohamed Abouarab (Egypt)



Figure 2 with Dr. Andrea Jester



Figure 3 Quick selfie with Dr. Charles Goldfarb

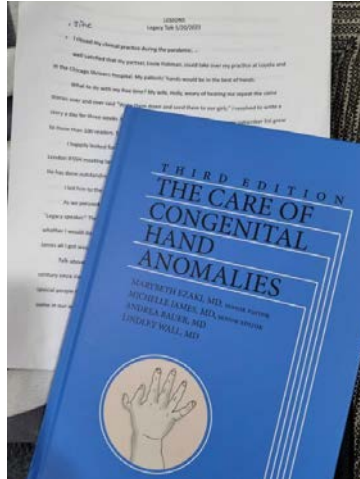
Scientific Sessions

The scientific sessions were very well attended. The level of interest was remarkable considering that the topics were highly subspecialized and not always easy to understand. I suppose feeling the passion and enthusiasm of the speakers encouraged the audience to actively engage and enjoy the discussions. It is fascinating that renowned experts may be in opposite poles of an issue yet very congenially and lightheartedly debate on the not-so-rare controversies in the understanding and management of congenital hands. The experience of different regions around the globe were well represented and it's interesting how amidst the diversity, we seem to have many shared challenges and joys in taking care of patients with congenital upper limb differences.



Fanboying

The Legacy talk by Dr. Terry Light was truly awe-inspiring. He gave a light and heart-warming narrative of his very productive and fun-filled years working on congenital hands. It was already a happy coincidence that I was sitting beside him and Dr. Marybeth Ezaki, Dr. Light was gracious enough to hand me his notes as a souvenir when I half-seriously asked if a transcript of his talk would be available.



*Figure 4 Fanboy souvenirs with Dr. Terry Light's Legacy Talk notes and an autographed copy of *The Care of Congenital Hand Anomalies**



Figure 5 Delighted to finally meet the "O" in OMT Classification (with Dr. Kerby Oberg)

Networking and Collaborations

One of the most rewarding aspects of WCS 2023 was the recognizing opportunities to network and collaborate with professionals from different corners of the world. Engaging conversations during the short breaks and social events fostered new friendships and possible academic partnerships. The unplanned hallway meetings connected me to friends in neighboring Asian countries who are similarly interested in joining forces to improve data collection within our countries and together as a region. This was followed by a meeting with a bigger group in the Asia Pacific Federation (APSSH) meeting the following week.



Figure 6. with Dr. Joseph Upton and colleagues from Asia, Dr. Soumen Das De (Singapore) Dr. Takehiko Takagi (Japan)

Scholarship Application and Guidance from ASSH

I must mention that the process for scholarship application was simple and pain-free. There were also regular reminders and guidance up to the last day of the conference. These were very helpful, especially for foreign delegates traveling on our own.

Moving Forward

After networking at the WCS and APFSSH, I am set to join a follow-up virtual meeting with fellow congenital hand enthusiasts in the Asia Pacific region. This was probably largely an effect of neighboring specialists realizing my interest through my presence in the WCS.

I have also served at least 5 congenital hand patients that may have benefited from important learnings that I brought home from the meeting.

Summary

Attending the 2023 World Symposium of Congenital Malformations of the Hand and Upper Limb was an extraordinary experience that left an indelible impact on my professional and personal journey as a hand surgeon. Most significantly, I feel less isolated in trying to understand congenital upper limb differences and realized that many across the globe are asking the same questions as I am and that many more are trying to find ways to solve the challenges in making our patients' lives better.

