



Australian Hand Surgery Society

HISTORY

The Australian Hand Club was established in 1972 and became the Australian Hand Surgery Society (AHSS) in 1990. We joined the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand (IFSSH) in 1977. The AHSS was a founding member of the Asian Pacific Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand (APFSSH), hosting the inaugural congress in Perth in 1997.

CURRENT STATUS of the AHSS

Currently there are over 190 AHSS members, provisional, active, senior, retired and honorary. The last group includes 32 overseas honorary members and 11 Australian honorary members. The AHSS maintains a close association with the New Zealand Hand Surgery Society, with 21 members of the latter group joining the AHSS as corresponding members. The current President is Anthony Berger from Victoria, who completes his two-year term in March, 2018. He will be followed by Michael Sandow from South Australia.

HAND SURGERY TRAINING AND PRACTICE

Most of those practising hand surgery as a substantial percentage of their work are AHSS members. Hand surgery training is under the auspices of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) through the Australian Orthopaedic Association (AOA) and Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) training programmes. Components of hand surgery training are included in the formal programmes of both groups. Orthopaedic and plastic surgeons obtain Fellowship of the College following completion of training (FRACS). Most pursuing a career in hand surgery then join hand surgery fellowship programmes in Australia and/or overseas. Recently the RACS, in collaboration with the AHSS, introduced a Post-Fellowship Education and Training (PFET) Programme in Hand Surgery. This programme is conducted by the AHSS and involves a minimum of 18 months of further training in hand surgery, 12 months of which must be within Australia. There is a formal curriculum and specific criteria, including attendance at national and international meetings, the conduct of a research project and satisfactory completion of the curriculum, leading to an examination by interview at the end of the programme. Surgeons who successfully complete this programme receive RACS/AHSS certification as having completed the PFET Hand Surgery Programme.

This formal training programme has been a significant advance in the efforts of the AHSS to introduce specific training programmes, standards and certification for those wishing to conduct a career in hand surgery. The realities of the Australian geography and the accumulation of most of the population in major cities by the coast, create logistical difficulties in delivery of health care, particularly of the sub-specialties. In university and other major hospitals in these larger cities, hand surgery services are usually delivered by hand surgery units working within orthopaedic or plastic surgery departments. Independent departments of hand surgery, although present in one or two cities, are uncommon. These centres deal with the more sophisticated hand conditions, traumatic and elective, the latter often in associated private hospitals. Smaller district and country hospitals may have the services of orthopaedic and plastic surgeons, who provide care for basic hand conditions but refer complex work to the main city centres. The training programmes described above must recognise these realities and teach all to manage some hand conditions and some to manage complex hand conditions.

AHSS EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The AHSS conducts an annual scientific meeting with an overseas guest speaker. The annual prize for the best scientific presentation now honours the memory of Bruce Conolly, who regrettably passed away in 2017. A prize for innovation in hand surgery is named for Tim Herbert. In 2012 and 2016 successful combined meetings were held with the American Society for Surgery of the Hand (ASSH), 2012 in Hawaii and 2016 in Sydney. Over 350 registrants attended the Sydney meeting. The AHSS hosted the IFSSH meeting in Sydney 2007, the APFSSH inaugural congress in Perth in 1997 and will again host the APFSSH congress in 2020, in Melbourne. The AHSS is responsible for organising the hand surgery components of the AOA, ASPS and RACS annual scientific meetings. Overseas guest professors are invited to join these programmes. In 2017, Australian hand surgeons were responsible for hosting the Symposium of Hand and Wrist Biomechanics International (HWBI) in Brisbane in July and the Asian Pacific Wrist Association Meeting (APWA) in Adelaide in October. Australian hand surgeons maintain a significant contribution to the literature, reporting basic scientific research and clinical investigations and techniques, with many serving as reviewers for submitted articles and others in editorial roles for publications such as the Journals of Hand Surgery, European, American and Asian Pacific volumes.

The AHSS is strongly supported by hand surgery associations/societies in most states. Each holds an annual general meeting, often with an overseas guest, and conducts regular clinical meetings throughout each year.

SOME AWARDS AND HONOURS

Recent awards and honours include the conferring of IFSSH Pioneer status upon Wayne Morrison, David Vickers and Tim Herbert at the 2016 IFSSH Congress in Argentina. Bruce Conolly, John Hueston, Bernard O'Brien, Benjamin Rank and Sydney Sunderland have been previously honoured. Wayne Morrison was invited to present the Swanson Lecture at the 2013 IFSSH meeting in Delhi. Bernard O'Brien (1979-1983) and Michael Tonkin (2013-2016) have served as Presidents of the IFSSH. Wayne Morrison and Michael Tonkin have served as Presidents of the APFSSH. Anthony Berger is the current APFSSH Secretary-General Elect. Others have been elected to committees of various national and international associations, such as the HWBI and APWA, and many have presented their work as invited speakers at international meetings.

Australian hand surgery continues to thrive, with an increasing sophistication of training nationally and with a significant international contribution. Perhaps the next step is the establishment of an independent specialty of hand surgery within the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

