

Hand surgery in Poland

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Hieronim Strzyżewski, the father of Polish hand surgery, started his work in Poznań Orthopaedics Department after getting experience in orthopaedics and hand surgery in the United Kingdom and the USA. He organized the first hand surgery department at Poznań University of Medical Sciences in 1970, which was the start of hand surgery development in Poland. A Hand Surgery Section of the Polish Orthopaedics Society was organized in 1965. The first hand replantation procedure in Poland was performed in Trzebnica in 1971 by Ryszard Kocięba, and replantation is now carried out in seven replantation centres.

The Polish Society for Surgery of the Hand

This Society was founded in 1998 in Poznań as a continuation of the previous orthopaedic hand section. The Society became a member of the European Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand (FESSH) in 1991 and a member of the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the hand (IFSSH) in 1992. The Polish Hand Surgery Congress has been held every 2 years since 1999, and recent congresses have been attended by around 300 participants. These congresses include both scientific sessions with oral and poster presentations and instructional lectures. The XIV FESSH Congress was held in Poznań from 3 to 6 June 2009, and was attended by over 1300 hand surgeons and physiotherapists from 64 countries. It was a great success. The IFSSH recognized the following Polish surgeons as Pioneers in Hand Surgery: Bolesław Nagay in 1998 and Władysław Manikowski and Jan Haftek in 2007.

Training and major practice

Hand training consists of a fellowship in a hand surgery department (Polish or foreign) and courses in hand surgery. There is no national certification for a hand surgeon. Our national society is developing training and examination procedures. Polish hand surgeons can obtain FESSH Hand Diploma certification.

Hand surgery is mainly performed by orthopaedic surgeons. Plastic and general surgeons treat a much smaller number of cases, mainly soft tissue problems and reconstructions. Polish hand surgeons deals with the pathology of the entire upper extremity in adults

and children. There are hand surgery departments in Poznań, Wrocław, Szczecin, Trzebnica, Białystok, Gdańsk and Kraków, which deal with clinic and scientific work. Patients may have difficulty accessing highly skilled hand surgery specialists.

Among the most commonly treated conditions are sports and labour injuries, amputations, chronic inflammation and degenerative diseases, neuropathies, rheumatoid arthritis and congenital deformities. Major joint replacement and arthroscopy are performed. Clinical challenges are reconstructive procedures after trauma, such as bony non-unions and tendon and nerve defects.

Several techniques and ideas have been developed by Polish hand surgeons that have extended worldwide. These include protocols for treating chronic regional pain syndrome by Andrzej Zyluk in Szczecin, development in transplantation in upper extremity by Jerzy Jabłecki, Trzebnica and Adam Domanasiewicz in Wrocław, a technique of tension-free nerve repair by Władysław Manikowski in Poznań, a T-shaped silicone rod for staged tendon reconstruction by Tomasz Mazurek in Gdańsk and a U-shaped external fixator for phalangeal elongation by Leszek Romanowski in Poznań.

Academic activities and hand therapy

Most academic activities are now associated with the national society and its meetings. Additionally, courses are organized by some centres, each with around 400 attendees. Courses with patronage of the FESSH or IFSSH are attended by surgeons from Eastern Europe, since it is convenient and affordable.

National recognition of hand surgery as a subspecialty needs to be achieved. There also needs to be improvement in hand therapy and development of hand therapy skills among physiotherapists. Quick access to good hand therapy is troublesome now.

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