

Now It's Your Turn - a note from the Permanent Scientific Committee of the EFSHT

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The European Federation of Societies for Hand Therapy (EFSHT) represents over 1800 therapists all over Europe. The Permanent Scientific Committee (PSC) is handling all scientific affairs related to scientific congresses and meetings organised by the EFSHT. Their primary responsibility lies with reviewing and selection of submitted material for presentation.

In 2008 we will have our next EFSHT meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland. We are already asking ourselves; what will make you attend this meeting? Of course, Lausanne has enough interesting things in itself to make you desire to come, but is that sufficient? We, as the PSC, think it is not.

The PSC is responsible for review and selection of all the submitted material for the scientific meetings of the EFSHT. We are looking forward to all the fascinating abstracts that will be submitted. However, when you attend a meeting and listen to presentations about for example flexor tendon repair; one study suggests to use a splint for 3 weeks, the other uses no splint. What will make you go home and change your protocol?

I have heard people complain about these meetings and the poor scientific level. It is true that in the hand therapy world we still have to deal with poor evidence of what we do. Just look at the two Cochrane reviews about Mallet and flexor tendon (Handoll and Vaghela, 2004, Thien et al., 2004) and you will see that there is *"Unclear evidence on the best mobilisation programme after surgical repair of flexor tendon injuries of the hand"* or *"Not enough evidence about the best way to treat mallet finger injury"*

What if 1800 therapists join hands or better their brains, shouldn't we be able to find more evidence. The PSC thinks that if we want to work on this, firstly, we need to agree what the appropriate outcome instruments are. To reach this we need Time's Person of the Year 2006: YOU. The World Wide Web is the tool for bringing together the contributions of millions of people and making them matter.

In scientific research this has proved to be possible through web-based surveys, which is called the Delphi Method. This is a technique aimed at building an agreement (consensus) about an opinion or view, without necessarily having people meet face to face, such as through surveys, questionnaires, emails etc. It has recently been used for a CTS validation (Graham et al., 2006) and by rheumatologist (Brown et al., 2005).

To develop clinical diagnostic criteria for carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) that modelled the clinical diagnostic practices of experts. Fifty-seven clinical findings associated with CTS had been ranked previously in order of diagnostic importance using Delphi as a method of establishing consensus among a panel of expert clinicians. The 8 most highly ranked criteria then were placed into all possible combinations to create 256 unique case histories. Two new panels of experts rated these case histories. One panel made a binary evaluation as to whether the case history did or did not represent CTS. This model then was validated against the judgments of the second panel of clinicians who estimated the probability of CTS for each of the same case histories. This methodology may represent a template for establishing consensus among experts on other controversial clinical issues. (Graham et al., 2006)

If you like to see an example and to see how it works; visit www.handweb.eu/delphi

In such surveys we might come to a consensus on subjects like assessment instruments in hand therapy, treatment protocols etc. If we reach e.g. a consensus on which outcome measures we agree that should be performed in flexor tendon rehabilitation, we will have outcome that can be compared. In this way we can start to compare treatment protocol and our knowledge will evolve. Presentations will become more meaningful when standardized outcome parameters are presented in stead of ambiguous measures.

You, as a EFSHT members can be involved and ‘feel’ you belong to this European family of hand therapist. You can suggest questions that can be used for surveys. In this way the EFSHT website becomes more of a communication tool.

References

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