**Bursary Report for the British Association of Hand Therapists**

**Abby Manley-Gilbert**

**IFSSH and IFSHT international congress**

**Exploring the extended role of hand therapy assistants (17-21/06/2019)**

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| **Introduction:** I currently work as a Band 7 Occupational Therapist in a large out-patient hand therapy team. One of my roles includes the development of the hand therapy assistant and instructor roles (HTA and HTI). Expansion of the department required a review of the role of the HTA and how their skills can be maximised in hand therapy. The HTA role was extended and reviewed to find, increased job satisfaction, improved retention of staff and annual financial efficiencies.I applied for the BAHT bursary to help fund my attendance at the 2019 Berlin IFSSH & IFSHT combined congress, to present in the free paper presentation section on this topic.  |
| **Topic:**Berlin is a fantastic city and was a great setting for the congress with easy transport links to and from the venue and to the surrounding sites. The congress was organised to a very high standard with world renowned surgeons and therapists presenting on current topics and literature. The programme was a complete mix of therapy and surgical components including free paper sections, workshops and seminars. The IFSSH and IFSHT app was very useful in providing an easy way to document useful information and notes from the congress. My experience of presenting was initially anxiety provoking but during the presentation I began to enjoy the experience and welcomed questions to explain more about the topic. This was my first time presenting at a congress and has really helped to build my confidence in public speaking. Videoing the presentation was useful in highlighting areas for improvement, facilitating positive changes for future presenting. I feel my practice has specifically improved from attendance at the surgeon directed presentations. These presentations have deepened my understanding and knowledge of choice of surgical techniques. It has developed my confidence in having more open discussions with surgeons around their surgical interventions. Information taken from the lectures on surgical repairs of flexor tendons will hopefully lead to a surgical discussion within the trust. Hopefully leading to standardisation of repairs between surgeons or increased levels of communication with therapists regarding adapting flexor protocols, based on the specific repair that the patient has received. I found the talks on cortical remapping particularly interesting in regards to how quickly representation of limbs and digits in the brain alters. 6 hours of immobilisation causes a slight impairment with 12 hours leading to significant impairment. Presentations discussed how grey brain matter reduces when areas are immobilised, due to the limb or digit being deemed as not functionally important at that time. For example, with amputations the representation of the amputated digit will decrease over time and in Syndactyly once the digits are surgically separated, representation of two digits will increase with input. Understanding how and why this happens has directly impacted on my practice. We commonly use sensory re-education and graded motor imagery techniques for nerve repairs and CRPS. I now consider these interventions for all conditions or injuries that lead to immobilisation for an extended period of time. Maintaining brain activation during immobilisation will aid recovery later down the line. The valuable information obtained from the congress was relayed back to the team through in service training. I felt honoured to be representing my trust and UK hand therapy on an international level. The presentation showcased the hard work that our team has done and hopefully my experience will inspire others in the department to put themselves forward in the future. I am extremely grateful to BAHT for awarding me the BSSH International Bursary and the opportunity to attend and present at my first international congress. The department hopes to continue the work on extending the HTA and HTI roles, potentially writing up our findings as a paper for submission for publication in the British Journal of Hand Therapy in the future.  |