



Report from Malawi Hand Therapy Training 2019

The British Society for Surgery of the Hand (BSSH) has provided hand training for doctors and orthopaedic clinical officers (OCO) in Malawi since 2015. The first hand therapy input on one of these courses was in 2017 when Meryl Glover (Hand Therapist) was part of the BSSH faculty at the OCO conference. Her input was very well received and led to the decision to try to provide hand therapy training to therapists coinciding with the next BSSH trip. In 2018 three hand therapists were invited to be part of the BSSH faculty delivering a COSECSA hand trauma workshop to surgical trainees. These hand therapists taught on the COSECSA course and also ran a one-day Introduction to Hand Therapy course which was also held in Blantyre.

The 2018 one day Introduction to Hand Therapy course was delivered in Blantyre to 29 therapists, therapy interns and therapy technicians. After review of the course evaluation and further discussion with Talumba Mankhokwe, lead therapist at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital (QECH), Blantyre and Tilinde Chokotho, Consultant Plastic Surgeon also at QECH it was decided that there was a need for:

1. Additional Hand Therapy teaching, specifically focusing on Trauma
2. An additional Introduction to Hand Therapy course in a different location.

There is no post-graduate hand therapy training available in Malawi or in the surrounding countries. Our focus is to increase local knowledge and skills such that a local faculty will, in future, be able to deliver specific hand therapy training in Malawi. There is a School of Physiotherapy since 2015 but no Occupational Therapy training. There is, therefore, a need to teach the full range of hand therapy skills to incorporate those more core OT based.

Health Service Malawi

Malawi offers free health care to those who can access the service. Malawi has approximately 17 million people with 32 General Surgeons, 11 Orthopaedic Surgeons and 2 Plastic Surgeons; with non-surgeons (Orthopaedic Clinical officers) treating the majority of hand injuries. Even after receiving initial treatment, aftercare and rehabilitation are seriously compromised due to the severe shortage of rehabilitation services with only 45 or so physiotherapists, 10 occupational therapists and 80 diploma level rehab technicians for the entire population's rehab needs.

Course Aims and Objectives were established and needed to:

Therapy for Traumatic Hand Injuries (2 days)

1. Meet the training needs and expectations of the delegates building on the previous year's course
2. Meet the needs of the local population
3. Collaborate with the next BSSH Hand Surgery Workshop for COSECSA to continue to promote and build a link between the surgeon's and therapist's training
4. Utilise only locally available equipment
5. Structure the days with time for practicals and discussion workshops – this was a consistent theme in the feedback from the evaluation forms.
6. Run combined practical sessions to encourage networking and collaboration between therapists and surgical trainees

Introduction to Hand Therapy (1 day)

1. Introduce the concept of Hand Therapy as a specialist area
2. Meet the recommendations taken from the first introduction by concentrating on anatomy and practicing practical elements of rehabilitation
3. Run the course in a 'district' hospital accessible to a different cohort of therapists

Summary

The courses were delivered in September 2019. Three Hand Therapists Sarah Mee, Zoe Clift and Debs Stanton travelled to Blantyre with 4 Hand Surgeons, Mr Jonathan Jones, Mr Jeremy Stanton, Mr Martin Wood and Mr Nicholas Sheppard and one plastic surgery trainee, Miss Shan Shan Jing. The team were aiming to deliver 4 courses in all, the BSSH COSECSA Hand Surgery Workshop, the Therapy for Traumatic Hand Conditions, The BSSH AO AF Hand Trauma Course for OCOs and the Introduction to Hand Therapy.

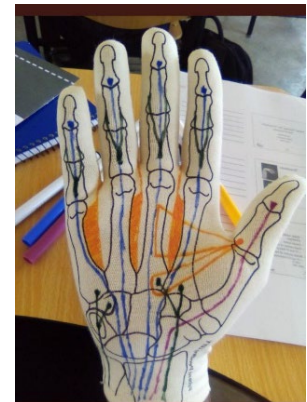
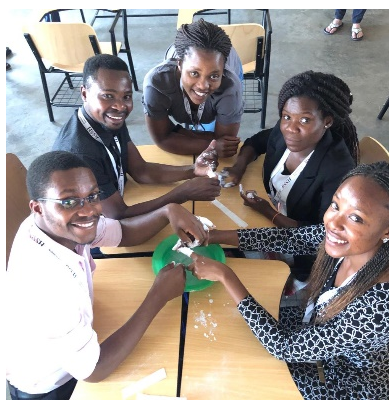
The faculty arrived in Blantyre with 2 preparation days to meet with our local faculty/contacts Mr Tilinde Chokotho and Talumba Mankhokwe, visit the hospital, assess the teaching rooms, put the delegate bags together, organise the IT, visit the market to purchase locally available equipment and run through the programmes of the BSSH COSECSA Course and the Therapy for Trauma course.

For both hand therapy courses delegates received a bag containing all the information and equipment they would need throughout the day/days of the course and ongoing for hand assessment and rehabilitation. Including the Anatomy Gloves which were kindly donated by Anatomy Software International, washable felt tips to practice the anatomy, scissors, notebooks and pens, a tape measure, a goniometer, an exercise ball, ruler and a comprehensive course booklet. All delegates who completed the courses were awarded a certificate of attendance.



Therapy for Traumatic Hand Injuries, QECH, Blantyre (2 days)

This course was run on the same days as the BSSH workshops. We hired, with the help of Talumba Mankhokwe, an excellent training room in the school of nursing with plenty of space. The delegates had been offered places through contacts also provided by Talumba. In all 23 delegates attended both days. The days were structured to include plenty of practical sessions between more didactic lectures.



On the second day the therapists were given the opportunity to watch and assist the surgical trainees with their tendon repair practicals and then work with the surgical trainees making forearm/hand resting splints and Flexor Hoods. The POP sessions were run by the hand therapists, allowing the surgeons a higher trainer to trainee ratios in the tendon practicals. The comments from both the trainees and the therapists about the mixed sessions were very positive.



Introduction to Hand Therapy, Mangochi District Hospital.

We were very lucky to be introduced to Edward Kondowe, the physiotherapist at Mangochi District Hospital who not only travelled to Blantyre to attend the Trauma course but freed up his treatment room, sourced seating, organised refreshments and assisted in some of the practical sessions



The delegates were a mix of physiotherapists and rehab technicians. They were fully engaged with the learning and enthusiastic and perceptive participants in all the sessions. It was a successful and fulfilling day, which received positive evaluation scores.

The course in Mangochi was delivered on the same day as the OCO Hand Trauma Course, held on the shores of the beautiful Lake Malawi, which involved one therapist teaching during the afternoon.



Moving Forward.

As a team we hope, over the next few years, to support Malawian therapists to take on the role of training and updating hand therapy skills in Malawi. Our hope is that there will be a Malawian faculty, alongside Malawian surgeons with an interest in hand injury, who will be knowledgeable and enthusiastic and strive to improve the outcomes for hand patients. After the first 2 years of training we are hopeful that we are some way further in achieving this, with Talumba Mankhokwe keen to be involved in teaching in 2020. We need to establish which aspects of our training are most pertinent to the conditions seen by therapists and are realistic in terms of the surgery provided, the geography and financial situations of the hospitals and patients attending. We propose to send an additional evaluation questionnaire to our recent delegates in 6-8 months time and hope to establish which training is most useful. A high percentage of the delegates requested incorporating patient sessions to enable therapists to learn in a more practical forum. This would require prior discussion with the therapists and surgeons, attending the hospital prior to the course to meet appropriate patients, assess, treat and gain the patients' consent and understanding.