

THE FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN SOCIETIES FOR SURGERY OF THE HAND: ITS BIRTH AND DEVELOPMENT—THE FIRST DECADE

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At sunset in July 1989 an opening ceremony took place in the square of the magnificent ruins of an ancient castle overlooking one of the naval bases of the Southern Italian harbour of Taranto. It was here that on the initiative of Professor Alessandro Caroli of Modena, Italy, representatives of the various national Hand Societies came together for a symposium and discussion on the formation of a European Society for Surgery of the Hand. Unfortunately, Professor Caroli did not speak English, which made communication rather difficult. Nevertheless we do owe to him the formation of the European Society.

THE CREATION OF FESSH AND THE BYLAWS

At the above mentioned meeting, Professor Alain Gilbert of Paris, France, took up the difficult task of grouping together the assembled representatives, and setting out a plan for the near future. His enthusiasm and working power were very stimulating. I was fortunate to be present and to witness the successful formation of the Federation, and to see the activity-cells starting to multiply. The purpose was to create an organization which represented hand surgeons in Europe and would improve their working conditions, as well as their rights, by advising European authorities on the requirements for, and standards of, hand surgery. Furthermore, an aim of the Federation was to rationalize and unify training and education and to set a qualification standard of minimal knowledge which was satisfactory for practice of the specialty of hand surgery within the European Community (EC) and those countries which are members of FESSH but which are not within the EC. The Federation also set out to develop and improve the skills and indications for hand surgery for the benefit of the patients (Aims and Purposes in the bylaws of FESSH).

Naturally, the above mentioned 'Aims and Purposes' were not directly established—this took a couple of years. In the first delegates meeting on February 11, 1990 in Paris, the name of the Federation was laid down as *Federation of European Societies for Surgery of the Hand (FESSH)*. Only recently, a Foundation has been created to officially register the name and to provide legal documents for transactions of any kind on behalf of FESSH. The membership list of FESSH would consist of no more than one Society per nation, and each Society should have a minimum of 15 members paying towards FESSH (see Table 1). The annual membership

fee of 10 ECU (later EURO) was set and it was decided that each Society should elect from their ordinary members a FESSH delegate for a period of 3 years, once renewable. Delegates' meetings were to be held once a year. At that time, the idea was to have a small, active working group. Therefore, the formation of an Executive Council, headed by a Secretary General and Treasurer, was proposed and accepted. The delegates meeting would elect a Secretary General for 3 years, a Treasurer for a 4-year period and Council Members for a 3-year period. A two-third majority of votes was necessary to become elected. Regarding voting rights, each National Society would have one vote if they had 15–100 eligible paying members and two votes if they had more than 100 eligible paying national members.

Alain Gilbert (France) was appointed as Secretary General and John Varian (Ireland) was installed as Treasurer. The Executive Council at that time was composed of nine members: five from the larger societies and four from the smaller societies. From the larger societies the delegates of France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom were confirmed, and



Fig 1 Professor Alain Gilbert with his honorary membership of FESSH plaque.

Table 1—National memberships of FESSH

<i>Member Countries: in 1991 (15 members)</i>	<i>Member Countries: in 2001 (21 members)</i>	<i>Associate Member Countries in 2001</i>
Austria	Austria	Czech Republic
Belgium	Belgium	Israel
Finland	Denmark	Lithuania
France	Finland	Slovakia
Germany	France	
Greece	Germany	
Ireland	Greece	
Italy	Hungary	
The Netherlands	Ireland	
Norway	Italy	
Portugal	The Netherlands	
Spain	Norway	
Sweden	Poland	
Switzerland	Portugal	
United Kingdom	Romania	
	Spain	
	Sweden	
	Switzerland	
	Turkey	
	United Kingdom	

from the smaller societies, members were chosen by ballot. In this way the delegates of Austria, Finland and The Netherlands were elected to the Executive Committee. The council would meet twice a year. Unfortunately, the structure proved inefficient and thus the Council now consists of the Secretary General, the Treasurer and the Chairman of the major committees (qualification and accreditation, examination, journal, research and internet). Alain Gilbert has been the great driving force behind FESSH. He was Secretary General from 1990 until 1996 and was proclaimed Honorary Member in 2000 at the FESSH meeting in Barcelona (Fig. 1).

The friendly Alfred Berger (Germany) succeeded him in 1996 and I became Secretary General in 1999, and will remain until the FESSH meeting in Amsterdam in 2002. The Treasurer was initially the ever humorous John Varian (Ireland) who stimulated the whole group with positive criticism. He was succeeded

by the hard working, punctual and gentlemanly Alberto Lluch (Spain) in 1997, who was followed by Daniel Egloff (Switzerland) in 2001 at the IFSSH meeting in Istanbul. A word of gratitude should be expressed to all the council members for their tremendous efforts for FESSH in the past and in the future.

FESSH MEETINGS

The Federation arranges congresses in two out of every three years (avoiding meetings in the year of the IFSSH meeting—see Table 2). At each congress there is an Instructional Course and an independent Scientific Committee judges the anonymous abstracts of the free papers submitted for presentation. If possible, the meetings are organised in conjunction with the European Federation of Societies for Hand Therapists. The attendance at the meetings so far has ranged from 400 to 1000 registrants (including hand therapists in most meetings). At the FESSH meeting in 2000 in Barcelona there were 696 FESSH participants, 153 EFSHT participants and 126 accompanying persons (in total 975 persons).

QUALIFICATION, ACCREDITATION AND EXAMINATION

One of the main topics on the FESSH agenda was, and still is, the accreditation of hand surgery training centres and discussion on the specialty of hand surgery. A list of training centres provided by the national society of each country has been created and is based on several lines of inquiry. Each national society is responsible for its list of national accredited training centres. However, it is not easy to set European standards for training centres, as the requirements for training are very different in different countries. Also, the fact that in most countries hand surgery is often performed by orthopaedic and plastic surgeons makes it even more difficult. Alfred Berger (Germany), Paddy Mulligan (UK) and others have tried to assemble valuable information concerning

Table 2—FESSH Congress meetings

Initial Meeting	Taranto	Italy	July 3–8	1989
1st FESSH Meeting	Brussels	Belgium	May 26–29	1993
2nd FESSH Meeting	Dublin	Ireland	June 19–24	1994
3rd FESSH Meeting	Paris	France	April 19–21	1996
4th FESSH Meeting	Bologna	Italy	June 15–18	1997
5th FESSH Meeting	Vienna	Austria	February	1998 (residents)
6th FESSH Meeting	Bonn	Germany	May 26–29	1999
7th FESSH Meeting	Barcelona	Spain	June 20–24	2000
8th FESSH Meeting	Amsterdam	Netherlands	May 22–25	2002
9th FESSH Meeting	Lisbon	Portugal		2003

IFSSH meetings were in 1992, 1995, 1998 and 2001: in these years no formal FESSH meetings were organised, but a residents meeting in Vienna was organised in 1998 because the IFSSH meeting was in Vancouver.

Important issues for FESSH besides the European meetings and the creation of bylaws were the recognition of training centres and the development of the European examination, the journal, scholarships and research.

this subject and Marc Garcia Elias (Spain) is presently trying to update our information on training centres. FESSH intends to publish this list in the near future.

Alfred Berger (Germany), William Souter (United Kingdom), Ann Nachmeson (Sweden) and later Peter Brüser (Germany) have performed the enormous task of creating and running the European examination which was first held in Paris in 1996 at the 3rd FESSH meeting. The objective was a European Diploma in Hand Surgery. The organization of a European examination is not a simple task, because of the differences which exist in training in Hand Surgery in different parts of Europe. Therefore different entry criteria have had to be utilized to cater for the different patterns of training in each country. The entry requirement is either 5 years of surgical training, of which at least 2 years must have been entirely in hand surgery in a recognised centre, or at least 1 year exclusively of hand surgery training after accreditation in plastic or orthopaedic surgery or the separate specialty of hand surgery which exists in a few countries. A countersigned logbook indicating performed and assisted operations, academic records and training posts held is also required. The logbook is provided by FESSH and contains 14 subsets, including tendon, joint and Dupuytren's surgery, replantations and congenital malformations and has a guide to the recommended number of operations.

The format of the examination is a multiple choice questions (MCQ) elimination paper, followed by three 40 minute oral examinations conducted by two examiners. The subjects covered in the orals are trauma, general reconstructive surgery and miscellaneous topics, like Dupuytren's and arthritis. The examination can be taken in one of the five main European languages; English, French, German, Italian or Spanish.

Up until now, five European examinations have been organized, all occurring just before or after the FESSH meetings. The total number of candidates so far has been 109 from 22 different countries, of which 80 have successfully passed the examination, obtaining the European Diploma in Hand Surgery.

JOURNAL

The council decided early on that it would be more appropriate to try to come to an agreement with the British Journal of Hand Surgery instead of starting a European Journal. I had the opportunity to negotiate on behalf of FESSH with the management committee of the Journal, in particular with David Dunkerley (United Kingdom), who was chairman of the management committee at that time. In a very positive atmosphere an agreement was reached commencing on January 1, 1993, in which the Journal of Hand Surgery was changed from the British Volume to British and European Volume and became the official journal of FESSH. One of the two assistant-editors is appointed by

FESSH (for FESSH: Caroline Leclercq (France) and later Ulrich Lanz (Germany)), two members of the Management Committee are nominated by FESSH and five of the 15 members of the Editorial Board are FESSH members. This agreement is renewed every 3 years. Of the 394 papers submitted in 2000, 227 were from Europe (58%). Of the total number submitted 35% were accepted for publication in the Journal. The acceptance rate for British and overseas members does not differ significantly (in 2000, UK: 33% and the rest of Europe: 36%).

FELLOWSHIPS

Several 3 month fellowships have been sponsored, but new funding is needed to create further fellowships.

RESEARCH

The great researcher and council member of FESSH, Goran Lundborg (Sweden) has set up a web page for research and has put down ideas to facilitate contact amongst European researchers in the field of hand surgery and related subjects. The website is www.thehand.com.

HISTORIAN

Antonio Landi is the historian of FESSH. His aim has been (and still is) to initiate, assemble, write and publish histories of hand surgery in the various countries. On his initiative articles have already been published in the Journal of Hand Surgery (British and European Volume). He has also organized a consensus meeting on replantation and revascularization in the upper extremity. The outcome of this type of meeting will help to set the standard in certain aspects of hand surgery throughout Europe.

INTERNET AND INFOLINK

The Internet plays a crucial role in our information exchange and, like IFSSH, FESSH is connected to the website www.thehand.com. All societies can submit information free of charge to this website. It contains information about meetings, abstracts, articles, exchange of medical information, etc.

In 1999, Frank Burke initiated the formation of a Centre of Manpower Statistics which is funded by FESSH. In 2000 a so-called Infolink-FESSH member was established in each country, who acts as the go-between for exchange of data to the Centre of Manpower Statistics. At the IFSSH meeting in 2001 in Istanbul, a FESSH membership directory 2001 will be issued: this is a great step forward in providing more information to FESSH members.

FUTURE

FESSH is successful. The growing number of participants at FESSH meetings and the willingness to organize these are one of the parameters of its success.

In my opinion, the future should concentrate on a thorough discussion on European standards for accredited training centres and on the formation of an interface specialty between orthopaedics and plastic surgery. I believe it is possible to create an interface specialty in most countries, except those who already have a separate specialty of hand surgery. A separate specialty can eventually evolve from the recognized interface specialty.

The future of the European Diploma in Hand Surgery is under discussion. For the time being, I would be in favour of continuing with it, until a proper alternative such as examinations by video conferencing or on the internet can be organized. I am also in favour of opening the exam to any hand surgeon who wants to apply; and not just to Europeans.

The Journal of Hand Surgery (British and European Volume) could benefit from a more European flavour, however that implies obligations towards the Journal from the various National Societies. Regarding the

organisation of FESSH, I personally believe that FESSH should stay a Federation and not become an Association, as the rules of the latter are much more strict. The bylaws need updating. In relation to future communications and data acquisition, the infolink and the Centre of Manpower Statistics have great potential to become a serious data resource for Europe. With the availability of these data, planning can be made concerning the required number of hand surgeons, hopefully with a certificate of the European Diploma in Hand Surgery. The internet can be very helpful for achieving better communications for the items specified above, for research, for standardization and so on. FESSH should work even harder to popularize this medium for use by all members in regard to the field of Hand Surgery. I believe strongly in FESSH. FESSH is here to stay. It has left its puberty behind and should become a real adult.

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