

Introduction

The Introduction to Hand Therapy Course evolved following two UK surgeons visiting Malawi in 2016 as part of BSSH overseas work. Then in 2017 a Hand Trauma course was organized by BSSH/ AO AF which included a UK Hand Therapist on the teaching faculty (Meryl Glover).

At the 2017 course it was identified that there was a need for therapists to have specific training in Hand Therapy in order to ensure surgical input was to be successful.

Health Service in Malawi

Despite there being little revenue in the country, there is free health care in the government hospitals. However, there is a paucity of funded posts in healthcare. There is about 1 Doctor per 65,000 people. Last year 4 physiotherapists were trained but only 2 of them are in paid jobs.

There are a number of Health Centres, which are run with Medical Assistants (MAs) and Nurses. There are 28 district Hospitals with MAs, Clinical officers (COs), Orthopaedic COs, BSC clinical officers and Medical officers. In addition, there are 4 central hospitals with Clinical Officers, Intern Medical Doctors, Trainee surgeons and Specialist Surgeons. Of the Surgeons, 26 are General & other specialities, 11 are Orthopaedic (1 of which is a Hand Surgeon) and 3 Plastic surgeons – for the whole country.

Malawi

Malawi, a landlocked country in southeastern Africa, is defined by its topography of highlands split by the Great Rift Valley and the enormous Lake Malawi. Malawi is known as the “Warm heart of Africa” in relation to its friendly welcoming peoples. In late September before the rains come the temperatures are 34-38 degrees centigrade, the jacaranda trees are in full bloom and with the sweet chestnut and acacia trees, savannah plains and traditional style African villages provides some beautiful scenery. Lake Malawi, Africa’s third deepest lake itself makes up almost a third of the country and on a clear night with a bright moon, you can see why it is called the “lake of stars”. The lake is full of “chambo” (Tilapia fish) but also has crocodiles and is a source of schistosomiasis.

The population of Malawi is approximately 18 million and the country is the 9th poorest country in the world. There are a significant nos. of NGOs involved and there is overseas investment from countries such as China. Life expectancy is approximately 51 years and Infant Mortality 48/1000 live births. 85 % of the population are unemployed and essentially subsistence farmers, resulting in a country with little revenue and the “public purse” is poor. The official language of the country is English, but the traditional language of Chichewe is spoken by about 60% of the people.

Therapy Report following Introduction to Hand Therapy Course

Venue: Beit Cure International Hospital, Malawi, 16th October 2018.

Faculty:

Sarah Mee (SM)- Consultant Hand Therapist/Occupational Therapist

Meryl Glover(MG)- Specialist Hand Therapist/ Occupational Therapist

Debs Stanton (DS)- Specialist Hand Therapist/Physiotherapist

Delegates: 29 delegates attended, comprising of 20 physiotherapists, 2 Occupational Therapists, 4 Rehabilitation Technicians, 2 Physiotherapy assistants and 1 nurse. The delegates attended from Beit Cure, Queen Elizabeth Hospital & Rehabilitation Centre.



Course Content:

The course content was formatted following liaison with the local Physiotherapy therapy leads based at Beit Cure and Queens hospital in Blantyre, who identified the priority clinical areas where learning would be beneficial.

Teaching techniques were varied from formal presentations, to workshops including practical sessions and discussion:

Lectures –

1. Assessment of the Hand
2. Splinting Theory

Workshops/Practical Sessions –

1. Exercises/ Strengthening/ Activity
2. Oedema and Scar Management.

3. Management of Stiffness.

4. Splinting Practical

Presentation with Practical Hands on-

1. Fractures/ Joint dislocations/Tendon & nerve injuries
2. Burns/ Hand Contractures including syndactyly

Therapists Teaching in Addition to Introduction to Hand Therapy Course:

MG & DS both presented on day two of the Hand Trauma workshop for COSECSA on 17th October 2018.

MG provided the additional workshop. MG ran a thermoplastic splinting workshop on 18th October for the therapists at Beit Cure.

Performance Health UK had donated thermoplastic material to Beit Cure, so this training was beneficial so that the therapists might be able to use the donated material effectively.

Clinical Input:

MG & SM did a joint clinic with two physiotherapists from Beit Cure. They provided their clinical expertise for patients presented by the physiotherapists.

MG attended a Club foot clinic with the Beit therapists, here she was able to assist with lower limb plastering and observe the therapists plastering skills.

Additional Information: All delegates were supplied with a comprehensive course manual. The contents of this manual was supplied by NES Hand Training www.neshands.co.uk. (SM is a Partner of NES)

Delegates were provided with a goniometer, scissors, tape measure, pen, note pad & sundries so they might practice the practical aspects during the course and then have the equipment to use in their workplaces to continue using the skills and techniques learnt on the course.



The manual & equipment was funded following a successful application to the IFSHT (International Society of Hand Therapy) teaching grant, donations from UK Hand Therapy Suppliers.

IFSHT also donated a Jamar Dynamometer to Queens hospital Blantyre, as part of their development of hand therapy in developing countries.

Summary: The Introduction to Hand Therapy Course was completed by 29 delegates. All delegates provided a feedback form with 21 providing additional comments.

The feedback strongly indicated that the course had been a valuable experience for all delegates. The popular request was for more training of this kind in the future, ideally a two-day course, to allow theoretical learning, clinical reasoning & practical modality practice.

The overriding message from the feedback comments was more courses and more time next time.

From the feedback and the positive participation from the delegates on the day, it can be concluded this inaugural hand therapy course was a resounding success and a worthwhile project for BSSH to have supported.