

HAND-INJURY CARE FOR ALL:

Strategic steps towards universal Hand Therapy coverage

Are hand therapy services available to all?

In South Africa, as in many parts of the world, access to specialist hand therapy services is not an option for the majority of the population. Hand-injured patients, dependent on their hands for their livelihood, rely on services delivered by generalist therapists who typically work in complex rural, remote or underserved practice settings, with few resources, little or no supervision, and minimal support.

How do we strengthen the capacity of generalist therapists?

The role of specialist hand therapists will remain a critical one. However, if we are to pursue a vision of quality hand therapy for all, it becomes essential to consider how the capacity of generalist therapists may be strengthened to extend access to basic hand-injury care services. We sought to tackle this question collaboratively in South Africa through a hybrid consensus development conference (CDC) supported by the University of the Witwatersrand and the South African Society of Hand Therapists (SASHT).

The Conference: considering the evidence

A call for abstracts for the conference was circulated in late 2022. Twenty-nine presentations were included in the hybrid conference held in Pretoria, South Africa on Friday, 24 February 2023. Evidence presented by local and international colleagues covered the practice realities and experiences of generalist therapists, the perspectives of service-users, relevant assessment and treatment practices, strategies for capacity strengthening, policy perspectives and practice innovation. A practice



The hybrid Conference was held at the CSIR Convention Centre in Pretoria, South Africa.

innovation that was well received was a mobile hand therapy station (Hand Therapy on the move) that has been piloted in two rural settings in South Africa. The backpack kit contains all basic splinting equipment and supplies, and occupation-based rehabilitation resources. The plan is for the kit to be placed on state tender to enable therapists to easily procure the resource. The design and construction of the kit will be shared via publication to enable the practice innovation to be replicated in other LMICs.



The mobile hand therapy station that can be pulled on wheels or carried on your back

A panel of fourteen stakeholders was invited to the conference to consider the evidence and establish consensus on what is needed to strengthen hand therapy services and the capacity of generalist therapists for this. The stakeholders represented: generalist occupational therapists working in rural and urban settings (Adri Cronje, Keri Collinson, Lauren Lubbe and Bibi Fatima Loonat), physiotherapy (Joanne Wylie), SASHT (Elani Muller), the South African Society for Surgery of the Hand (Dr Antoine Rocher), service users (Tshepiso Kolomote and Hena Dajee), the National Occupational Therapy Forum (Rogini Pillay), the Occupational Therapy Association of South Africa (Anisha Ramlual), Occupational Therapy Education (DrThuli Mthembu), Research (Dr Hester van Biljon) and the Department of Health (Thabani Ncwane).

Conference attendees were able to share their perspectives on the evidence presented on post-it notes (in-person attendees) and via the Zoom chat (online attendees). The stakeholders considered these impressions before embarking on the consensus development process. Key themes that emerged from these contributions was accessible information and learning resources; the need for mentorship, Communities of Practice and networks; and the role of undergraduate education.



Stakeholders review attendee perspectives prior to following the consensus development process.

Developing consensus: using a nominal group technique

The consensus development process took place on Saturday 25 February 2023 using a nominal group technique. The key question posed to the group was: What is needed to make quality hand therapy happen in public services?

The first step of the process involved generating ideas in response to this question and the evidence presented at the conference. Each stakeholder silently and independently recorded his or her ideas on cards. In the second step, ideas were shared and recorded in a round-robin format until all ideas (167 in total) had been exhausted.

Step 3, discussing ideas involved clarifying each idea and collectively sorting these into categories. The ideas were clustered into ten categories.

Voting on ideas, the final step of the NGT, was completed using interactive presentation software (www.mentimeter.com).



Step 1: Stakeholders generate ideas independently



Step 2 & 3: All ideas were shared and recorded, after which ideas were discussed and collectively categorized

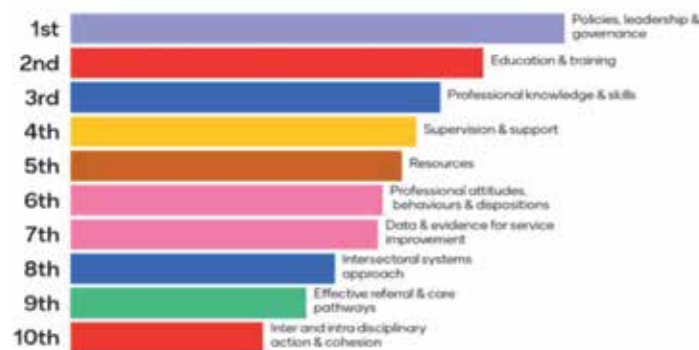


Figure 1: Consensus on priority areas for action to enable quality hand therapy in the South African public service voted by stakeholders (n=14)

Each stakeholder ranked the ten categories that they considered most important for the delivery of quality hand therapy. Figure 1 illustrates the result: the top five priorities were policies, leadership and governance, education and training, professional knowledge & skills, supervision and support, and resources. The specific areas for intervention within each of the ten categories is undergoing further analysis and will be shared via journal publication.

One small step towards universal hand therapy coverage: where to from here?

The CDC has been instrumental in highlighting the needs of generalist occupational therapists for delivering hand therapy as well as identifying prioritized areas for action. But the hard work lies ahead: opportunities to leverage international partnerships should be explored to extend the impact of this project beyond the South African context. Quality hand therapy for all is an ambitious vision but one that invites us to pool our expertise and resources to extend hand therapy to the populations that need it the most. The production of high-quality open access educational content for generalist therapists may be one strategic way that we can work towards this vision.



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IFSHT NEWSLETTER - REACH VOLUME 3, NO. 1

UPCOMING EVENTS



At the time of writing the first issue of volume 3 of the IFSHT newsletter is being prepared! Please check out the following link to access it: https://ifsht.org/publications/?publications_category=29
The publication aims to collate Research, Education, Achievement and Clinicians in Hand and upper limb therapy around the world.

This edition of REACH will introduce a new segment for therapists on how to write and publish research. It also continues to present to you snapshot of recent research pertinent to hand therapy and also a new feature, "...on the horizon", about ongoing research which will inform practice in the near future.

The issue will feature new clinical pearls and the Spotlight On! Section will feature the Hand Therapists Society of Türkiye and, we also continue our new "Volunteer" section. It will also feature a further two recipients of the prestigious IFSHT Lifetime Achievement Awards in a new interview format. The recipients were Sarah Ewald and Suzanne Caragianis. We call on hand and upper limb therapy clinicians and researchers to submit any contributions for consideration to: informationofficer@ifsht.org



Just around the corner the FESSH-EFSHT 2023 Congress is being held from 10th -13th May 2023 in Rimini, Italy. Please follow the link for more details: <https://fessh-efsht2023.com/>



On 6th to 7th October 2023, the British Association of Hand Therapists will hold their annual conference in Bournemouth. Event details at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/baht-conference-bournemouth-2023-tickets-576111564197>