

## SEVENTH NATHALIE BARR LECTURE



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### Look How Far We Have Come . . .

Fifteen years ago, hand therapy was essentially an unknown profession around the world, with very little impact in this country. Within the medical field there were very few surgeons who recognized the value of a "hand therapist." Many leading hand surgeons viewed hand therapy as an unnecessary discipline or at best, an ancillary service. Look how far we have come. . . .

From the depths of anonymity to an air of recognition, hand therapy has seen tremendous changes. Feeling like a dinosaur swept up in this fast-evolving profession, I have pondered how the change in recognition of this profession has occurred so quickly. I believe the answer can be found in the dynamics of the American Society of Hand Therapists. This Society has created an evolution in hand therapy.

Evolution is defined as the process of change by degree; a progressive advance from something simple to something more complex. Evolution therefore aptly describes what has taken place in the hand therapy profession.

Last year at the ninth annual residents and fellows conference, the highly esteemed hand surgeon, Dr. Paul Brand, spoke on "The Pursuit of Happiness." Dr. Brand stated that "there is now a partnership between hand surgeons and hand therapists, which is still moving forward!" Dr. Brand added that "hand surgeons today have come to depend upon the opinions and skills of the hand therapist." What higher regard could be paid to hand therapists than the recognition of Dr. Brand?

Although dramatic changes have occurred within the ASHT, the basic principles remain the same: rec-

ognition, standardization, research, and quality care. These changes, reinforced by our principles, have propelled the ASHT and us as hand therapists into a meteoric rise in recognition.

Within our parent organizations, The American Occupational Therapy Association and the American Physical Therapy Association, hand therapy has become a highly recognized subspecialty. The blending of the two competitive fields has become a unique and successful concept directed towards the common goal of providing quality patient care.

Fifteen years ago, there was no recognizable symbol for hand therapy. Today we have two logos representing the profession of hand therapy. The ASHT logo is now known worldwide as a sign of quality. Look how far we have come. . . .

Recently, the certification logo became known as a symbol of professional quality. The certification process has expanded our society while sharpening the skills of our membership. Over 15 years, the ASHT membership has increased by 400%, to nearly 1,500 members. Physicians and third-party payers are now recognizing and demanding the services of certified hand therapists.

The value of certification lies with the recognition of those outside of our specialty. Recognition through certification gives us a better chance to become a more integral part of the health care industry, an industry which is increasingly dominated by managed health care. By 1995, it is estimated that 50% of the United States will be covered by some form of managed care. According to *Medical Interface*, the publication for the managed care industry, "nearly thirty percent of the population is currently enrolled in managed health care today." Time restraints and treatment limitations will have an increased impact on our ability to provide quality care. As we move into this era of increased regulation and decreased funding, more than ever we will need to provide

Presented at the American Society of Hand Therapists 15th Annual Meeting, Phoenix, Arizona, November 8, 1992.

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quality education and professional standards to meet the future demands of hand therapy.

Historically, our society has risen to this challenge. It is said that observation is the essential ingredient to education. In our formative years, we raised standards and quality by observing each other, our mentor surgeons, and our mentor society, the American Society for Surgery of the Hand. Since our inception, many distinguished surgeons from this society have shared their knowledge and wisdom. Much of this collaborative knowledge has provided educational opportunities, advancing our society from having a simple outlook to having a more complex and sophisticated view of hand therapy and hand surgery. The vigor and growth of our specialized profession are well reflected in the numerous educational opportunities the ASHT now provides.

Fifteen years ago, at our first annual meeting, there were three scientific papers. At our last annual meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, there were comprehensive educational tracts, instructional courses, scientific posters, and nine scientific papers. Look how far we have come. . . .

Continuing education courses sponsored by the ASHT have covered topics as diverse as "Occupational Injury, Prevention and Rehabilitation" to the "Surgical Concepts and Rehabilitation of the Shoulder." Today we have transcripts of meetings, videotapes, and educational materials on hand therapy to further enhance learning opportunities for therapists. As the educational opportunities have increased, there are more and more therapists expressing an interest in the profession of hand therapy.

The *Journal of Hand Therapy* brought together therapists from all over the world, enabling them to share opinions, ideas, and research. The richness of this knowledge has rewarded us by increased recognition and influence as a profession. The *Journal of Hand Therapy* is available in most medical school libraries and is used as a reference by both physicians and therapists. Many articles can be traced to the Scientific Sessions at our annual meetings. These scientific papers are often a direct result of the quality research performed by our members. Look how far we have come. . . .

Promoting research was one of the most important founding principles of the ASHT. Our conviction to promote research resulted in the recent establishment of a foundation. The Hand Therapy Foundation will provide opportunities to our members to engage in clinical studies and scientific research in hand therapy. Through research we strengthen our profession, ourselves, and, most importantly, our patients.

Ongoing research by some of our members has already led to new materials, evaluation, and testing devices, giving rise to improved patient care. The contributions, insight, and analytic abilities advance our skills every day, bringing new levels of standardization and precision to our profession. We have indeed come a long way. As we become more scientific and precise, our treatments continue to improve.

I especially appeal to our new members. You

bring the vitality, energy, and exuberance necessary to provide for the high level of research required to assure our patients quality care in the future.

An evolution has taken place in the profession of hand therapy. That evolution has brought us to a pinnacle of recognition, due to the ASHT's ability to develop, make changes, and integrate ideas. We have seen quantum leaps in education, standards, and publications, as well as exciting inroads for advancing hand therapy through research.

Finally, this evolution has brought us to the most essential principle upon which our profession is based—providing quality care. I have devoted my career to patient treatment and I know many of my patients have unknowingly benefited from the vitality and changes articulated by this society. The past 15 years have been the most rewarding that I have experienced as a therapist. I am thankful for the many friends in this society, friends who provided advice and support, sometimes at only a moment's notice.

The Nathalie Barr Lectureship, which I have been so fortunate to receive, is certainly important and I feel honored. The real rewards however, have come from the daily pursuit of my profession as a hand therapist. As therapists, we are able to see the creativity, benefits, and changes of improved function nearly everyday. As I see these changes occur in my patients, I often think how great it is to be a hand therapist! There is no greater reward than seeing our patients return to work in professions they love, sometimes against seemingly insurmountable odds, and to return to useful, active lives, enjoying the activities which provided fun, relaxation, and satisfaction.

The improved function of our patients is one of the ultimate rewards of hand therapy. Hand therapy touches not only hands but hearts, minds, and livelihoods. My sentiments were recently echoed by Docteur Jean Pillet, as he was fitting the prosthesis on a patient of mine who is a forequarter amputee. Docteur Pillet told me, "I have only one standard . . . my standard is my patient's ultimate satisfaction! My patients' satisfaction, and their happiness, gives me my reward."

As members of the ASHT, we must continue to provide educational opportunities, standards, and research to guarantee that the next generation of hand therapists will have even greater capabilities to provide quality patient care.

Fifteen years ago, as the Inaugural President of the ASHT, I encouraged the founding membership to take that "one small step." They responded by providing that "giant leap for mankind." The ASHT has obtained recognition and has improved standardization and education, while realizing the value of research. The continued fulfillment of these principles increases our ability to provide quality care.

Let us join hands and continue to step forward by contributing in our own unique and special ways to the growth in our professions of occupational and physical therapy and to our specialization in hand therapy. The ASHT and its members can be proud of how far we have come!