

Belgium Hand Group

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Belgium is a constitutional monarchy in northwestern Europe, independent since 1830 with Brussels as capital and headquarters of the European Union and of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). With a population of 10,414,336 inhabitants (2009 estimate), Belgium has its own hand surgery society, **The Belgian Hand Group (BHG)**, established on May 30, in 1972 by six founding members: A.de Coninck (president), G. Calberg (vice-president), J.J. Rombouts (secretary), P. Van Wetter (treasurer), G. Matton (consultant) and E. Vander Elst (consultant).

Between 1972 and 1975, the BHG included 12 members and 20 associated members. The group has progressively grown to a total of 106 associate members in 2018, with 58 full members, 5 honorary members, and 11 foreign members. These members are either orthopedic, plastic or even general surgeons, with a majority of the two formers. The BHG holds two meetings per year, occasionally with sister or related societies. More informations on the group and its activities can be found on the website created on June 18 2001: www.belgianhandgroup.be and regularly updated.



Photo: Meeting of ancient presidents and founding members of the society at the occasion of the 30 anniversary of the Belgian Hand Group, in 2002. Back row (left to right): P.Wylock, G.Lejeune, H.De Frenne, J.P.Moermans, L.Kinnen, L.De Smet, F.Schuind. Front row : J.J.Rombouts, G.Matton, M.Lejour, P.Van Wetter.



Albert de Coninck (1972 to 1975), a plastic surgeon organized the first meeting of the BHG in Brussels on December 9, 1972. He was a microsurgery pioneer in Belgium, like Pr W.Boeckx. He performed the first free flap in Belgium in 1971 and directed the department of plastic surgery at the Université Catholique de Louvain.



Georges Calberg (1976-7) was the editor of the Acta Orthopaedica Belgica. He had a great learning in orthopaedics and directed many publications. He was the first in Belgium to orient all his activity to hand surgery.



Guido Matton (1978-9), a trainee of J.W. Littler was the head of the department of plastic surgery at the University Hospital in Ghent. He was the only Dutch speaking founding member of the BHG and the father of plastic surgery in Flanders.



Henry Evrard (1980-1) from Charleroi organized a major combined meeting of the Belgian Hand Group and the Société Française de Chirurgie de la Main in Lille from 29 to 31 May 1981.



Madeleine Lejour (1982-3) was the head of the department of plastic surgery at the Université Libre de Bruxelles from 1978 till 1993. She organized the 10 th Anniversary of the Belgian Hand Group in Brussels and invited many European authorities in hand surgery. The guest of honour was John Hueston from Melbourne.



Georges Lejeune (1984-5), past president of the Royal Belgian Society of Surgery performed the first autotransplantation in Belgium of a complete avulsion of an arm above the elbow, the 4 th of March 1971, in Liège. He was the president of the first EFFSH in Brussels in 1993. Among the replantations, we also note the first thumb replantation in Belgium by Dr. Depoorter, the 20 th of January 1975, in Bruges.



Hervé De Frenne (1986-7) organized on June 14, 1986 in Waregem a BHG Day on "The Rheumatoid Hand" with professor R.Tubiana from Paris as Guest of honour.



Pierre Van Wetter (1988-9) was one of the most famous hand surgeons in Belgium. He founded the first unit in Belgium exclusively dedicated to hand surgery and hand rehabilitation. He has also a great expertise in the evaluation of corporeal damage. At the IFSSH & IFSHT congress in Buenos Aires in 2016, in recognition for the outstanding contribution for the hand surgery, he received the title of IFSSH pioneer of hand surgery.



Paul Wylock (1990-1) was the head of the department of plastic surgery at the University Hospital of the Free University Brussels till 2011. He is now retired. He organized with Willem Elias in 93 the exhibition of sculptures and paintings called "Praise of the Hand" in Brussels on the occasion of the first congress of the FESSH. He is the historian of the Belgian Hand Group. His magnum opus (2010) is a historical study of G. Dupuytren "The Life and Times of Guillaume Dupuytren, 1777-1835".



Alain Carlier (1992-3) from Liège is well known for his extensive experience in microsurgery and replantation surgery and as professor of an



Louis Kinnen (1994-5) is the head of the hand surgery department at the Clinique du Parc Leopold in Brussels. He has a very large experience in trapezometacarpal implants.



Jean-Pierre Moermans (1996-7) is well known for his thesis about Dupuytren's disease and promoted the segmental aponevrectomy and later, the collagenase injections. He was Professor of hand surgery at the Free University of Brussels.



Luc De Smet (1998-9) of the Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven is an authority in wrist pathology and congenital hand anomalies and author of many publications.



Frederic Schuind (2000-1) organises every year an international congress on hand and upper limb surgery, in Genval, Belgium. He performed the first hand allotransplantation in Belgium at the Academic Hospital Erasme in Brussels the 15th of June 2002. He is chairman of the european accreditation of hand surgery.



Danny Vandenberghe (2002-3) is hand surgeon in Antwerp with a special interest in implants for the hand and wrist.



Fernand Van Innis (2004-5) is also President of the Société Royale Belge d'Orthopédie et de Traumatologie (2008-2009) and leads with Yo Baeten the discussions regarding the hand surgery at the social security and government levels.



Raphaël Van Damme (2007-2008) from Aalst (B) is a pupil of the school of Ghent (B) and Nancy (Fr).



Olivier Barbier (2008-9) is involved in clinical and teaching activities at the Cliniques Universitaires St-Luc in Brussels. He organizes the sessions on complex hand injuries and congenital pathology for the interuniversity training in hand surgery.

Jean Goubau (2010-11) from Brugge is a trainee of Professor Yves Allieu (Montpellier – France) and Jean-Luc Roux (Montpellier – France). He started the activity of SOS Hand (emergencies) in 2006. His main interests are pathology of the basis of the thumb and wrist arthroscopy.



Jorg Bahm(2012-3), Is the first president of the German part of Belgium. He is the Belgian reference for the brachial plexus and especially for the obstetrical brachial plexus palsy. He is the editor in chief of the Journal of Brachial Plexus and Peripheral Nerve. He was the co president with Dr Yo Baeten of the FESSH congress in Antwerp in 2012. He works in Brussels at the Erasme University Hospital and in Aachen (Germany) at the Franziskushospital.



Nadine Hollevoet (2014-5), is the chief of the department of hand surgery at the University Hospital of Gent. She published regularly about distal radius fracture and trapeziometacarpal arthritis.



Luc Van Overstraeten (2016-7) is an expert in the carpal instability. He is implicated with Erasme University Hospital in the teaching of the wrist arthroscopy. He promoted to change the bylaws in 2017 so that the BHG is not only a scientific organisation, but can also act as an official representative of all Belgian hand surgeons.

HAND EMERGENCIES ORGANIZATIONS

In 1972, in Paris, Vilain organized a facility for the treatment of the hand in emergency « SOS Main ». After Paris, Strasbourg and Nancy in France, Liège in Belgium developed a « SOS Main ». In 1979, nine french surgeons (Vilain, Merle, Allieu, Foucher, Alnot, Magalon, Saffar, Michon, Lemerle, Bureau) and one belgian (Lejeune), created the European Confederation for Hand Emergencies that will be renamed as FESUM (Federation Européenne des Services d'Urgence de la Main) in 1989, and later integrated the Hand Trauma Comitee (HTC) of the FESSH.



In 2009, Belgium counts 5 centers SOS Main FESUM (Bruxelles, Bruges, Namur, Courtrai, Liège) and 2 centers accredited by the FESSH (Bruges, Brussels, Leuven, Nivelles).

The Belgian Federation of Hand therapist (www.bht.be) is an other national society, member of the EFSHT and the IFSHT (European and International Federation of Societies of Hand Therapists) working in close collaboration with the BHG.



BHG AS MEMBER OF THE FESSH AND IFSSH.

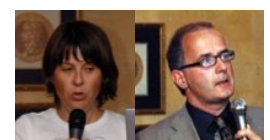
The BHG is an active member of the FESSH since its foundation and is also a member of the IFSSH.

An important event in 1993 was the organization of the First European Congress of the Federation of the European Societies for Surgery of the Hand (FESSH) in Brussels from May 26 to May 29 1993. The members of the organizing committee were G. Lejeune, F. Schuind, J.P. Moermans, W. Boeckx, A. Carlier, H. De Frenne, S. Monstrey, J. Otthiers, J.J. Rombouts and P. Wylock.

Again, Belgium will organize the Congress of the European Federation of the Societies for Surgery of the Hand from the 20th to the 23rd of June 2012. The congress will be hosted by the city of Antwerp which due to an ancient legend has a hand as symbol. Antwerp filled with the monuments of a wealthy medieval and Renaissance period is also the world's fifth-largest port and the leading diamond-cutting center in the world.



The organisation of the congress is directed by two co-presidents: Yo Baeten and Jorg Bahm. Yo is certainly one of the pillar of the BHG, acting as secretary since the year 2000.



TRAINING AND DIPLOMAS

In Belgium, hand surgery is not considered as a speciality by itself and there is no specific training for it. Therefore the surgeon interested in hand surgery, has to complete his training either in orthopedic or in plastic or even in general surgery (usually in 6 years) before to consider a post graduate training in a Belgian or a foreign hand unit.

However, there are two main ways to obtain a certification in hand surgery:

1. Through the European Federation of Society for Surgery of the Hand's diploma (entry criteria: www.fessh.com)
2. Through a "Belgian Hand Surgery Certificate" Course, grown out of the DIU, but now with the participation of all Belgian Universities. It includes 2 years course of 8 modules covering all aspects of hand surgery, with an final exam. The course is aimed at residents and seen as a preparation and not an alternative for the EBHS diploma.

AN OLD STORY IN A YOUNG COUNTRY ORIENTED TO THE FUTURE

Belgium is a young country (1830) but people of this region have a long tradition of innovation and quality in medicine. Andreas Vesalius Bruxellensis (or Andre Van Wesel native of Brussels) performed dissections of the hand and the upper limb and reported his observations in the founding book of modern anatomy "De Humani Corporis Fabrica" (1543) richly illustrated by Titian's pupils.

Belgium remembers its past but is also oriented to the future as demonstrated by the logo of the technological exposition organized with a great success on a two year basis in Gent, between 1983 and 1999.

In the same way, the Belgian Hand Group has been so far a very dynamic group, rich of the experience of its predecessors and giving the opportunity to the new generation to take over.