

Hand Surgery in Israel

In the early 60's, a few members of the Israeli Orthopedic Society and the Israeli Plastic Surgery Society developed a special interest in surgery of the hand. Professor Isidor Kessler was the first to convert his occupation from general orthopedics to surgery of the hand as his primary and then sole profession. In order to do so he first studied under the Boyes group in California, where he was active mainly in development the Niebauer Prosthesis.

After his return to Israel, he opened the first service for surgery of the hand at the Kaplan Medical Center in the city of Rehovot.

In 1967, after the Six-day War, many upper limb injuries needed efficient and professional care. There were other wars to come, the War of Attrition and Yom Kippur War, with over 10,000 injured, about a third of which suffered from upper limb injuries. To deal with the injured, the Ministry of Health founded five medical units dedicated to surgery of the hand.

Today there are hand surgery units in all medical centers in Israel as well as a hand surgery department at the Sheba Medical Center in Ramat Gan.

According to guidelines of the scientific board of the Israeli Health Organization, there must be at least two attending surgeons working full-time in order for the center to initiate a fellowship program.

In 1975, Israeli surgery of the hand became known internationally following the first international symposium held in Israel with the participation of the American Association for Surgery of the Hand and other societies, alongside the Israeli surgeons. In 1979 another international symposium was held in Tel Aviv.

In 1989, the Israeli Society for Surgery of the Hand (ISSH) was founded and hosted the fourth meeting of the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand in Tel Aviv. Later on, more meetings were organized in cooperation with the Greek, Italian and French Societies.

In 2000 the Israeli Society celebrated its tenth anniversary in an international convention in Jerusalem, with the participation of societies from around the world.

Since 1990, the Israeli Medical Association acknowledged surgery of the hand as an official fellowship. In order to be acknowledged as consultant for surgery of the hand in Israel, a fellow must undergo an orthopedic or plastic surgery residency, followed by a fellowship in surgery of the hand. The fellowship is two and half years, during which the candidate must participate in a specified list of surgical procedures as well as participate in symposiums, journal clubs and academic activities. The fellow must also pass written and oral board exams in hand and microvascular surgery.

The largest initiative to advance hand surgery in Israel was taken, without a doubt, by the late Professor Kessler. His work on subjects such as lengthening of fingers, repair of flexor tendons, among others, are international milestones.

The largest department for surgery of the hand was founded by Professor Joel Engel in the Sheba Medical Center, a large public medical center in Israel. Professor Engel finished his residency at Sheba and later his hand surgery fellowship with Professor Tubiana in Paris, Professors Nalebuff and Tupper in the United States and Vanio in Finland.

The late Professor Weinberg founded the unit for surgery of the hand at the Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem. Professor Weinberg and his associate Professor Neuman, the chief of plastic surgery, were among the founders of surgery of the hand in Israel.

Professor Reiss founded the unit for surgery of the hand in Ziv Medical Center in Safed, after which he continued to work at the Rambam Medical Center in Haifa. Professor Reiss is one of the developers of the Kullen Nicole Reiss prosthesis for metacarpophalangeal joint arthroplasty. This prosthesis has had great success in the treatment of patients suffering from arthritis in Great Britain.

Dr. Karev continued as head of the department for surgery of the hand at the Kaplan Medical Center, after Prof. Kessler. Dr. Karev graduated fellowship training in the United States under Professor Kleinert.

These founders of hand surgery in Israel, since the 70's, taught and guided a generation of students who would grow to become the leaders of hand surgery in Israel and would serve the public with innovative treatment of all diseases and injuries of the upper limb.

There is a network of units and specialists in the field of hand surgery throughout Israel. The Israeli Society continues to organize two annual meetings, hosting numerous foreign guests each year. It also grants two annual grants - for best achievement in the fellowship board test and for best study presented by a young surgeon at an international meeting.

In 2012, the Israeli Group for Hand Therapist was formed under the ISSH and recognized by the International Federation for Societies of Hand Therapy. The therapist are today an integral part of hand surgery in Israel.

The Israeli Society is a member of the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand (IFSSH) as well as an associate member of Federation of European Societies for Surgery of the Hand (FESSH). There are approximately 50 active members in ISSH.

In 2017, a joint meeting with the German Hand Society was held in Jerusalem, including the participation of the Secretary General of FESSH. In 2019, the Israel Society was guest society at the annual meeting of the Brazilian Society for Hand Surgery, held in Gramado, Brazil. ISSH continues to nurture international cooperation, advancing the care of hand surgery patients and the education of young surgeons, promoting research initiatives as well as public awareness of our profession in Israel.

Surgery of the hand is no longer a profession in the making but a well-recognized specialty with a short past, but a great future.

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The Israeli Society for Surgery of the Hand