

"Hand and wrist rehabilitation. Theoretical aspects  
and practical consequences"

by Grégory Mesplié

Professor Claude Verdán (1909-2006), true pioneer in reconstructive surgery of the injured hand, and founder of the *Musée de la Main* (Lausanne), devoted his entire life to studying the hand from all perspectives. The museum was inaugurated in 1997. In his inauguration speech, Dr. Verdán compared the hand to a family of five brothers, all similar, all looking alike, and yet different in terms of their role. Certainly, each finger has a specific protagonism in the overall function of the hand. They are all important, and yet there is a hierarchy among them: the thumb is the leader, the conductor of the orchestra, and the *sine qua non* of hand function. Thanks to its remarkable ability to oppose, the thumb ensures adequate manipulation of objects. The thumb possesses a skill that none of the other fingers have. Without that skill, any attempt to grasp an object is futile.

I was thinking about this, when I got an e-mail from Biarritz. It was my friend Grégory Mesplié. The good news was that, finally, his work on hand reeducation, so nicely published in French, would be made available also in English. What an excellent initiative! There are not that many knowledgeable upper limb therapists in the world for us to learn from, and he is one of the very best. Indeed, this man's work deserves to be on the shelves of all our libraries,...and I mean it!

The problem was that he wanted me to write a preface for that book. I knew from the start that being asked was an honor that I could not refuse. My agenda, however, was about to explode with commitments. How could I find the time to write a meaningful preamble? Furthermore, how could I come up with the right words to express my admiration for what people like Grégory is doing? Of course, finding the time was not really a problem: there is always time for a good cause, and his cause is one of the best. The problem was the preface itself. What should I say? How to cope with this assignment?

It was then when I thought about Verdan's analogy. If a hand is like a family, as stated by the prestigious Swiss surgeon, and if the ideal hand unit is also like a family, as defended by my friend Mesplié, a hand unit must be like a hand! (What an interesting syllogism!)

If we assume this thought to be correct, who would play the role of the five digits in an ideal hand unit? Well, I have spent some time trying to come up with an answer; let's see if you agree with me. In my opinion, the index finger (the pointing finger) would be a surgeon who knows when not to operate. The middle finger would be a rheumatologist who believes on surgery and therapy. The ring finger would be a radiologist that does not need the "Netter's Atlas of Anatomy" to describe a complex carpal dislocation; a radiologist who does not copy-and-paste radiology reports. The little finger would be a multi-tasking nurse that is not afraid of speaking on behalf of the patients' needs. And finally, the thumb,...who would be the thumb? Who would be the *sine qua non* of an ideal hand unit? Doubtless, the thumb would be the hand therapist.

I am not saying that the other professionals are not important, they are, but the thumb is what gives meaning to the hand. A surgeon without a therapist is like a hand without the thumb, is like a car racer without trained mechanics in the boxes, is like a crane without a hook at the end of the cable. Certainly, a hand unit without a good team of hand therapists is a complication waiting to happen. Truly, when I send one of my patients to a fine therapist, I feel safe: my suboptimal repairs will be in good hands.

What do I like from this book? I like almost everything: the concise, matter-of-fact style of writing, the clarity of concepts, the didactic figures, the surplus of ideas for the future,...; but above all, I like the authors' insistence on team work, on sharing knowledge, on refusing isolation. The author's emphasis in setting multi-disciplinary groups is, in my opinion, the key to success. As my friend John Stanley's says: there is nothing more dangerous than a hand surgeon who does not believe in therapy. I am sure that this book will help reducing such prejudices.

In 1978, Jim Dobyms & Ron Linscheid stated that wrist surgery is, at best, a compromise between the ideal and the possible. They were absolutely right. However, there is no better way of reducing the distance between the ideal and the possible than

collaborating in the dissemination of the hand therapy principles defended in this book. Such is my enthusiasm for the publication you have in your hands.

I will close this preface trying not to sound as overly transcendent as Isaac Newton when he uttered the famous sentence "In the absence of any other proof, the thumb convince me of the existence of God". My closing statement will be more modest, but still certain: "In the absence of any other proof, this book convinces me of the existence of a bright future for those who suffer a hand injury". Indeed, this is a thorough, meticulous, extremely didactic publication, by a team of highly respected professionals. It is, undoubtedly, an important contribution to medical science.

And again,...I mean it!

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