

HAND SURGERY

QUARTERLY



HARD THERAPY AND AFFILIATES' CORNER

2002 AAHS Vargas Hand Therapy Fellowship

Veronica Fernandez, PT

From Caracas, Venezuela to hand therapy centers in Jackson, MS, San Antonio, TX, Pittsburgh, PA and Philadelphia, PA

August 26 – September 22, 2002



Veronica Fernandez PT (left) observes a patient with posterior interosseus nerve lesion perform functional activities with supportive glove.

A Venezuelan in the USA

The AAHS was honored to sponsor Veronica Fernandez PT from Caracas, Venezuela, during her travels, in the United States as the 2002 recipient of the AAHS Vargas Hand Therapy Fellowship. Ms. Fernandez, as a founding member of the Venezuelan Hand Therapy Society, was chosen to receive this award as an extension of the Association's mission to foster international dialogue and growth in hand therapy and surgery. Veronica's first contact with the AAHS occurred when Dr. Alan Freeland and Lynn Bassini, MA, OTR, CHT, as Vargas Award recipients, traveled

to Venezuela in 1998. Since that contact, she has endeavored to expand hand therapy services in Caracas hospitals and throughout Venezuela. In this role, Veronica has invited several members of the AAHS to participate in the annual Venezuelan Hand Therapy Society meeting.

Language barriers, which should preclude meaningful communication, were swiftly overcome when Veronica arrived at the St. Dominic Hand Management Center in Jackson, Mississippi, on August 26th. Her



Veronica Fernandez (left) and Maureen Hardy on the Mississippi River in picturesque Natchez, MS.

enthusiasm for hand therapy and love of patient contact became an effective mode of translation. Maureen Hardy PT, CHT, Director of the Center, noted that the staff's Spanish improved in parallel to Veronica's English. During her stay, Veronica observed diverse therapy programs for upper extremity

continued on page 6



Patient with TFCC repair demonstrates wrist strengthening exercises to Veronica (center) and Maureen Hardy PT, CHT (right).

HARD THERAPY AND AFFILIATES' CORNER

continued from page 1

patients, participated in clinics with physicians at the University of Mississippi Medical Center and at Plastic & Hand Surgery Associates, and attended two seminars: one therapy presentation on Scar Biology and a resident lecture on Surgical Approaches to Nerve Repair.

After all this academic stimulation, we escaped to Natchez, MS where Veronica could see the mighty Mississippi River, tour antebellum plantations, and dine in the oldest restaurant on the river



Cathy Sanders PT CHT (left) and Veronica discuss treatment options to mobilize a stiff finger.

(reputed to be haunted, and we did hear footsteps!). Our staff benefited from the daily cultural and professional exchanges that occurred and thank Dr. Alan Freeland, Past-President, for his commitment to this international venue.

On September 3rd, Veronica flew to San Antonio, Texas, where Sylvia Davila PT, CHT, and Miguel Saldana MD, both fluent in Spanish, hosted her stay in their clinics. During her visit she observed a wide range of hand cases, from trauma to CTD to RA reconstruction. Veronica noted similarities between her native country and the USA in the role insurance coverage has on health care deliv-

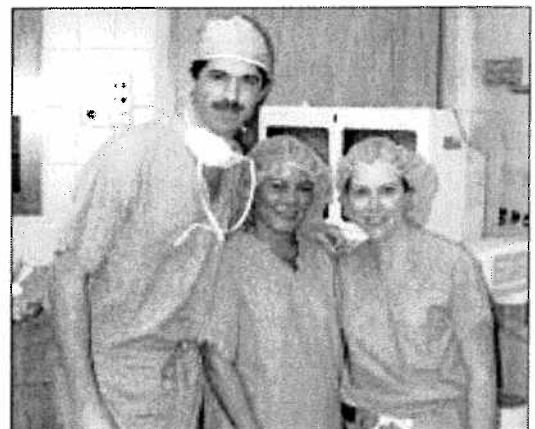


Front row, left to right: Terri Wolfe OTR/L, CHT, Pam Steelman CRNP, PT, CHT, Sue Michlovitz PhD, CHT, Veronica Fernandez PT, and Georgette Fogg OTR/L. Back row, l to r: John Lubahn MD, Mark Baratz MD and John Taras, MD.

ery. However, she did comment that in this country the volume of paper work is intimidating. While PT & OT skills remain very separate in Venezuela, Veronica was impressed with the "cross-training" of hand therapists in the USA that allows one therapist to fabricate splints, design exercise programs, apply modalities, and simulate functional activities on work simulator equipment. Sylvia Davila and Veronica both agreed that communication between hand surgeons and hand therapists is the key for effective management of hand patients. They also agreed that the best shopping is along Riverwalk, where they enjoyed the historic and outdoor ambiance of this intercity refuge.

Next, Veronica flew to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to visit Paul Brach PT, CHT, at the Centers for Rehab Services at Allegheny General Hospital. Her time was divided between observing in the clinic with Paul

and in the operating room with Dr. Mark Baratz. One of the highlights of her trip, besides getting lost on the downtown streets of Pittsburgh, was attending Dr. Baratz's annual hand conference at Allegheny General Hospital. This 2-day conference focused on trauma of the upper extremity and ended with Dr. Baratz's famous "finger bowl tournament" in which teams play jeopardy-style to answer challenging questions. Veronica was showered with Pittsburgh memorabilia and gifts to commemorate her visit.



Veronica (center) in the Dr. Baratz' OR.

Aviva L. Wolff, OT, CHT

Personal: I grew up in Rockland County, NY, and spent several years in Israel as a child. I returned as an adult with my husband who was doing research there. While in Israel, with the help of Jeanne Melvin, I devoted time to educate both physicians and therapists in appropriate rehabilitation techniques for scleroderma. I also treated a large number of congenital hand injuries (in both the Palestinian and Israeli populations). I currently reside in Paramus, NJ, with my husband, Danny, and our three daughters.

Education: BS in Occupational Therapy from SUNY Downstate; graduated cum laude. Certified Hand Therapist since 1997.

Employer: Senior Hand Therapist, the Hospital for Special Surgery. I have been employed at Kessler Institute in NJ, Connecticut Hand Surgery Center, Kupat Cholim in Jerusalem, Accelerated Hand Therapy in NJ, and The Hospital for Special Surgery in NYC.

AAHS Involvement: Became an affiliate member of AAHS this year. Presented a poster on the unstable elbow at the 2002 meet-

ing in Cancun. Presented a talk at the Hand Therapy Specialty Day at the 2003 meeting in Kauai on PIP fracture dislocations. I have volunteered to join the program and education committees.

Best Part of My Job: Working alongside the most skilled and competent surgeons and therapists.

Major Accomplishments:

Published in *Orthopedic Physical Therapy Clinics* ("Elbow Fractures and Rehabilitation"), and *Techniques in Hand and Upper Extremity Surgery* ("Therapeutic Management of Total Elbow Replacement"). Co-researcher on "Easy Surgical Correction of Dynamic Digital Swan Neck Deformity in Cerebral Palsy," presented at ASSH 56th Annual Meeting 2001. Won the Best Scientific/Clinical Poster Award for "Early Postoperative Management of the Unstable Elbow" at the ASHT 23rd Annual Meeting. Instructed an orthotic and prosthetics course at Touro College's graduate program in occupational therapy, and guest lectured at various PT and OT programs on topics including splint-



AVIVA L. WOLFF, OT, CHT

ing, elbow injuries, sports injuries of the hand and wrist, and scleroderma.

Clinical Specialties: Elbow injuries, the pediatric hand, and scleroderma.

Greatest Challenge: Balancing work and professional activities with my family life. I believe that being a good mother to my children and good friend to my husband makes me a better therapist to my patients. My goal is to be there for my family, my friends, my patients, and my co-workers.


Three Words That Describe Me: In the words of Anna Quindlen: "I show up, I listen, I try to laugh."



Veronica concluded her US visit in Philadelphia, "the city of brotherly love", with Sue Michlovitz PT, PhD, CHT. Veronica audited Sue's course on Evidence Based Practice in Orthopedic PT at Temple University, (what was her grade Dr. Michlovitz?). Scott Kozin MD graciously hosted Veronica at the Shriners Hospital for Children where Veronica observed the evaluation and treatment planning that is crucial in developing treatment strategies for the pediatric population. Dr. Kozin and Ms. Fernandez both recognized that the pediatric population offers a unique challenge in

individualizing intervention. Veronica was exposed to the full Philly flavor of hoagies, pretzels, the Liberty Bell and "break-the-fast-dinner" of Yom Kippur. Veronica's schedule also included an impromptu visit to the Venezuela Consulate in New York to replace lost travel documents; what a great excuse to visit the Big Apple!

In summary, those of us who had the opportunity to meet Veronica Fernandez wish to express our extreme gratitude to the AAHS and Venezuela for this extraordinary cultural exchange. She is a valuable, intelligent therapist who

is a credit to her country. The Association's mission statement, to foster growth of hand surgery and therapy around the world through the Vargas Hand Therapy International Teaching Award and Vargas Hand Therapy Fellowship, was realized in this one rewarding experience. We applaud this initial venture and anticipate future international pursuits. 

Written by Maureen Hardy PT, CHT, with contributions by Paul Brach PT, CHT, and Sue Michlovitz, PT, PhD, CHT.