Hand surgery in Malaysia began as management for leprosy. A leprosarium was set up in Sungai Buloh, a 15 minutes drive from Kuala Lumpur. The set up included inpatient facilities and residences for patients requiring long term management. Many patients decided to reside around the hospital to escape social stigma and group together economically to grow and sell flowers and potted plants. The area became known for selling plants and flowers, admittedly is not an ideal occupation for those with insensate hands, but nevertheless helped them to make a good living and in some cases, to prosper.

The late Dr K. Thambyrajah was a pioneer in Malaysian hand surgery. He worked in Sungai Buloh Hospital in the 1960s. He remembers Dr Dakshiamoorthy and himself performing 20 to 30 procedures a month on hands and feet. The main problem they encountered was the high ulnar nerve lesion. Today, Leprosy is still the world’s main cause of high ulnar nerve palsies. They performed Brand’s many tailed transfer, as an anti-claw procedure. They also performed opponensplasties for median nerve lesions at the wrist. Sadly, they were not able to restore the debilitating loss of sensation. We are little better at that even today.

There was also help available from overseas. The legendary leprosy surgeon Dr Grace Warren and others visited from Australia. They examined and operated on patients and guided young surgeons. “The Leprosy Mission of England” also helped by sending physiotherapists to rehabilitate these unfortunate patients. Dr Thambyrajah did two fellowships with Mr Pulvertaft at the Derbyshire Royal Infirmary and on returning joined the Orthopaedic Department of the University of Malaya. With encouragement from Prof Dr P. Balasubramaniam, the head of the Orthopaedic Department and advice from Prof Dr Pesi Chacha, a visiting examiner from Singapore, microsurgical practice laboratory was setup using the rat carotid artery model. Today, the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery runs a continuous Basic Microsurgery Course, which has been successfully continued for the past 14 years.
Dato’ Dr Abdul Hamid Abdul Kadir did a fellowship with Dr Campbell Semple in UK. He joined the second medical school in UKM, the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and set up a microsurgery practice laboratory there. In 1983, he organized a Hand Surgery Course under the banner of the MOA and the College of Surgeons of Malaysia.

The distinguished faculty included Dr S.P. Chow and Dr P.C. Leung from Hong Kong, Dr Venkataswami from India, Dr Campbell Semple from UK, Dr Chehab Helmi from Indonesia and Dr Robert W.H. Pho from Singapore. Dato’ Dr Abdul Hamid Abdul Kadir and Dr Khaw Joo Hua represented Malaysia. Over the years, there has been much cooperation and transfer of skills from nearby and distant countries. Dr P.C. Leung performed the first two toe-to-thumb transfers (one in each of the two medical faculties) in 1985.

Over the years, many more young surgeons developed an interest in Hand and Microsurgery and several did training abroad. Dr V. Pathmanathan and Dr R. A. Vaikunthan were the first to do fellowships at the Christine Kleinert Institute of Hand Surgery, Louisville, Kentucky, USA. After their return, enthusiasm was high and the Malaysian Society for Surgery of the Hand (MSSH) was formed. It was registered on the 3rd of March 1993. Dato’ Dr Abdul Hamid Abdul Kadir became the protem President and Dr V. Pathmanathan was secretary. The motto of our society is “Excellence through Hand Surgery”.

Two emeritus members have been appointed; Dato’ Dr Abdul Hamid Abdul Kadir (2011) and Prof Dato’ Dr Tunku Sara Tunku Ahmad Yahaya (2012).

The current committee:

- **President**
  - Prof Dr Manohar Arumugam

- **Vice President**
  - Dr Ranjit Singh Gill

- **Honorary Secretary**
  - Dr Rashdeen Fawzi

- **Honorary Treasurer**
  - Dr Ravindran Thuraisingam

- **Committee Member 1**
  - Dr Ruban Sivanoli

- **Committee Member 2**
  - Assoc Prof Dr Shalimar Abdullah

- **Committee Member 3**
  - Dr Teh Kok Kheng

- **Committee Member 4**
  - Dr Chuah Chee Kheng

The surgeons worked closely with therapists and decided to make therapists full members of the society, a very unique cooperation not seen in any other country. Several therapists, especially Mr Nathan Vytilingam, were active in the committees in the early days. However, later on it was decided to revert to an association membership similar to those overseas, with surgeons as full members and therapists as associate members. We ran joint “Roadshows” with therapists, in most of the states of Malaysia, where surgeons would talk about various topics covering mainly hand trauma and therapists would hold splinting and therapy workshops.

In 1993 the Malaysian Society for Surgery of the Hand (MSSH) organized the 1st Malaysian Conference on Surgery and Rehabilitation of the Hand. This was a successful international course. The guest speakers included internationally renowned therapists such as Judy Colditz,
and top surgeons including Dr Robert W.H. Pho, Dr Tsu Min Tsai, Dr David Green, Dr Teoh Lam Chuan and Dr James Hunter. The next conference was entitled “The 2nd Malaysian Conference on Surgery and Rehabilitation of the Hand” but quickly became known as the “2nd Hand Meeting”. We invited in addition to the previous regional guests, Dr Jean Pillet, the famous prosthetist from France, and other famous hand surgeons such as Dr Venkataswami and Dr B. B. Joshi from India. It was again very successful, although on a visit to the Tropical Jungle Learning Centre (Rimba Ilmu) in University of Malaya, a thunderstorm broke out and a bolt of lightning struck a few feet from Prof Dr Robert Pho.

Since those two big international conferences, the specialty of hand surgery has been slowly and quietly gaining strength. There have been circle meetings at least three times a year. These meetings are loosely based on the circle meetings held in Liverpool, UK and the concept was brought back by Master Ch. Orth. (Liverpool) candidates. The meetings are held traditionally in homes of surgeons, and are casual meetings where exchanges of ideas occur and discussions on difficult problems are held. These casual and warm meetings are in line with Malaysian culture and have been readily accepted and proved to be an invaluable source of learning and camaraderie. Yearly annual scientific meetings are held in conjunction with the MSSH annual general meeting and have been well attended. In addition, other courses that have been held are the Universiti Malaya (UM) cadaveric flap course 2007, the Universiti Putra comprehensive course 2008, UM Basic Microsurgery Course for the past 14 years and the Kuantan National Course on Hand Trauma for 4 years.

I designed a logo which was adopted by the MSSH in 2007 which is meant to reflect many different cultures and disciplines that are interwoven and working towards excellence in hand surgery.

The Department of Hand Surgery in the Ministry of Health was setup in the Kuala Lumpur Hospital in 1986. It moved to Selayang Hospital in 1999. It was headed by Dr V. Pathmanathan, a pioneer who has been involved tirelessly in the training of Hand Surgeons since the department was established. This department was transferred back to Orthopaedics in June 2016.

On the 18th of May 2000, a team led by Dr V. Pathmanathan the Department of Hand Surgery, Selayang, performed the world’s first arm and hand transplant on a one-month-old baby girl from her twin. Since the twins were identical, there was no need for anti rejection drugs. It was also the worlds 9th successful hand transplant. The child is doing well until today.
When the Ministry of Health began four year subspecialty courses for postgraduate, Hand and Microsurgery was included. The four years include a one year fellowship abroad. The programme was reduced to 3 years. So far graduates from this programme are Dr Chuah Chee Kheng (2011), Dr Rashdeen Fazwi (2012), Dr Ruban Sivanoli (2014), Dr Jeremy Prakash (2016) and several others are enrolled to meet our future needs.

The trauma seen in our country has attracted fellows in Hand and Microsurgery from abroad such as: Dr Tracey Horton (U.K. 2006), now Consultant Hand Surgeon in Derby, UK; Dr Simon Tan (U.K. 2007), now a consultant hand surgeon in Birmingham, UK. This exchange of ideas and also culture is excellent for our local surgeons. We need to benchmark our standards with international standards.

When FESSH (Federation of European Societies for Surgery of the Hand) began their Hand and Microsurgery examination to foreigners, Dr Vaikunthan Rajaratnam sat and won the Churchill Livingstone prize. Prof Dr Sharifah Roohi Syed Waseem Ahmad topped the class. Prof Dato’ Dr Tunku Sara Tunku Ahmad Yahaya passed it in 2009 and Assoc Prof Dr Shalimar Abdullah in 2010. Malaysian hand surgeons will continue to seek international benchmarking and this may be one venue.

The congress of the Asian Pacific Society for Surgery of the Hand was held in Kuala Lumpur from 2nd to 4th October 2014. It was held at KL Hilton and Meridian Hotel and was hailed by all as highly successful including the hand therapy section.

What the MSSH aim for in the future is

- to have a uniformly high standard of care for hand conditions and injuries throughout the country.
- to have a high standard of local postgraduate training in hand and microsurgery.
- to aid, catalyze and foster formation of a hand therapists group for training and learning.
- to form and maintain closer international links.
- to carry out more research.
- to look into prevention and treatment of hand injuries in the local context.
- to be a presence at all international conferences.
- to publish in all major hand surgery journals.

With a dynamic group, a critical mass of members and god’s grace, we hope these goals can be achieved.