



CONFERENCE REPORT

Fascia 2007: The First International Fascia Research Congress—A report

Fascia is alive! The role of the connective tissue has traditionally been relegated to the job of deftly holding our ‘parts’ together (as though that wasn’t enough). On October 4/5 2007 the First International Fascia Research Congress convened at Harvard University in Boston, at which the finest scientific minds in the world came together to tell us *otherwise*. The quality of the presented material, the questions raised, and the promise of collaboration yet to come as a result of this congress, was far beyond the expectations of all in attendance.

- George Pellegrino, LMT, CMTPT, RMTI, Co-director of Myofascial Rehabilitation Center, Ltd., and Co-Founder of the American Institute for Myofascial Studies, LLC

Thomas Findley, MD, PhD, and Robert Schleip, PhD, thought it was due time that the scientists that were studying fascia meet with the clinicians that were treating it. They started to plan a gathering where the finest researchers in the field would present the latest and best scientific fascia research. Seventeen of the world’s most eminent fascia researchers, who between them had published over 1500 publications in peer-reviewed journals collaborated, and along with a further 16 key representatives from various clinical disciplines, a multidisciplinary team was formed that collaborated over a period of 2 years to create a landmark event: The First International Fascia Research Congress (see [Figure 1](#)).

On October 4 and 5, 2007, the stylish modern glass building of the Joseph B. Martin Conference Center at Harvard Medical School played host to healthcare professionals from 26 countries and 40 US states. The conference drew interest from a wide variety of disciplines: 75% of the participants

were manual therapists or practitioners (chiropractors, osteopaths, acupuncturists, physical and massage therapists) while 25% were medical physicians or scientists. This diverse group assembled in Boston, eager to learn about fascia in all its various forms and functions.

Interest in the conference was greater than anyone could have expected. When the conference sold out nearly 6 months before the event, state-of-the-art audio-visual transmission allowed presentations to be viewed from auxiliary rooms throughout the conference center. With enough material for 3 days and a conference center that was only available for two, the organizers decided to extend the conference hours to a 12-h program on the first day and a 10-h program on the second. With everyone’s cooperation, this jam-packed agenda was amazingly able to run according to schedule. Mechanotransduction was the first of four main topics addressed.

Donald Ingber, MD, PhD started things off by discussing tensegrity and mechanoregulation (see [Figure 2](#)).

Paul Standley, PhD, MD, spoke about how human fibroblast cytokine expression is regulated by biomechanical strain and suggested an in vitro model for myofascial release.

Helene Langevin, MD, presented her findings on the dynamic connective tissue fibroblast cytoskeletal response to tissue stretch and acupuncture.

Alan Grodzinsky talked about chondrocyte mechanobiology and its relevance to matrix molecular mechanics and tissue remodeling.

Frederick Grinnell, PhD, taught the basics of fibroblast mechanics in three dimensional collagen matrices. Collectively, this segment of the event explained the role of mechanotransduction in cell culture systems, in tissues and in the entire living organism. The research presented on mechanotransduction had exciting implications for bodyworkers, suggesting that the efficacy of manual therapies may be explained as the action of mechanical pressure being converted into chemical signals in the body.

As the second featured topic of the conference, Giulio Gabbiani, MD, PhD, James Tomasek, PhD, and



Figure 1 Thomas Findley, MD, PhD, opening the proceedings of the Fascia Congress (photograph Hallie Robbins, DO).



Figure 2 Donald Ingber, MD, PhD, describes the tensegrity model (photograph Sue Seecof).

Boris Hinz, MER, PhD, addressed the evolution, mechanoregulation, and contractile function of myofibroblasts. Myofibroblasts are atypical fibroblasts that combine the ultra-structural features of both fibroblasts and smooth muscle cells. Due to their expression of stress fiber bundles containing alpha smooth muscle actin, and due to strengthened adhesion sites on their membrane, these cells possess a much higher contractile potential than normal fibroblasts. The contribution of myofibroblast contraction in wound healing is well established; however, more recent discoveries of the presence of myofibroblasts in other connective tissue, such as ~~ligaments, tendons and~~ broad fascial sheets, has provided early evidence that connective tissue contractility is also an important factor in normal musculoskeletal dynamics.

One of the problems with connective tissue research has been ambiguity about what is fascia

and what is not. Frank Willard, PhD, cleared up this confusion in his presentation on the four layers of fascia in the first of three main presentations on the anatomy and biomechanics of fascia. He pointed out that ligaments, tendons and aponeuroses are comprised of dense regular connective tissue and are technically not fascia. Fascia, or dense irregular connective tissue, can be understood as four concentric tubular-shaped layers made up of pannicular, axial, visceral and meningeal fascia, within which all organs systems of the body develop.

Peter Huijing, PhD; Andry Vleeming, PhD and Moshe Solomonow, PhD, continued the theme by explaining how essential connective tissue is to force transmission and power, while Serge Gracovetsky, PhD, rounded out the panel in his presentation that asked, “Is the lumbodorsal fascia necessary?” Participants laughed hard as he wove humor into his convincing demonstration of what the human body would be like without this large aponeurotic sheet of tissue. Gracovetsky was later awarded the \$2000 Dr. Ida P. Rolf Award, sponsored by the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration, for the best oral presentation. Who knew how funny fascia could be?

Fascia pain mechanisms was the final main topic of the Fascia Research Congress, and was of special interest to all the attending clinicians who treat people in pain.

Siegfried Mense, PhD, explored the neuroanatomy and neurophysiology involved in low back pain.

Jay Shah, MD, shared his research using a novel microdialysis technique that showed increases in the levels of chemicals associated with nociception, inflammation and muscle contraction in the area of myofascial trigger points.

Geoffrey Bove, DC, PhD, reviewed the epineurial anatomy and reported how this nerve-fascia can cause pain symptoms in its own right.

Partap Khalsa, DC, PhD, concluded the session with his insights into the proprioceptive and nociceptive mechanisms of joint capsules.

In addition to his scientific contributions, Partap Khalsa, DC, PhD, also presented information on the funding program of NCCAM—the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Dr. Khalsa had good news for all of the budding researchers in attendance. Grant money is available for fascia research projects and the funding officers of the program are there to help prepare proposals.

Concurrent parallel sessions provided participants with a large array of choices to further explore their particular interests. The presenters included those whose submitted abstracts were

accepted for oral presentation as well as invited speakers. “Presenters from around the world brought invaluable and unexpected insights into fascial function and dysfunction. For example, W.J. Fourie of South Africa showed that the fascia lata coordinates complex thigh muscular activity, with a critical role played by the integrated vastus medialis and fascia lata. This relatively minor insight immediately affected my practice,” said Rena Margulis, developer of Tandem Point Integrated Acupressure therapy.

Forty-three of the accepted abstracts were presented as posters and were available for viewing during the entire conference. A \$500 award for the best poster, sponsored by the Fascia Research Congress, was presented to Julie Ann Day; Carla Stecco, MD, and Antonio Stecco, MD, from Italy for their work entitled *Fascial manipulation technique: anatomical basis and clinical implications* (see Figure 3).

The First International Fascia Research Congress was an intensely exciting experience. Extremely well organized, it was a true smorgasbord of information, with state-of-the-art presentations of scientific research concerning the fascial system. We were thrilled to have received the Best Poster Award. This acknowledgement of our work and, in particular, the lifetime of clinical research and study of our mentor, Luigi Stecco, encourages us to continue in our efforts to comprehend the intricacies of the fascial system. Arriverderci in Amsterdam, 2009!

- Julie Ann Day, Physiotherapist; Carla Stecco, MD; Antonio Stecco, MD and Alessandro Pedrelli, Physiotherapist

For Sue Hitzman, developer of MELT (Myofascial Energetic Lengthening Technique), one of the highlights was seeing the movie *Strolling Under the Skin* by JC Guimberteau, MD. Sue said, “It blew my mind!” This movie was offered as an optional lunchtime activity on the first day of the conference. On the second day, participants had the choice of attending the Ida P. Rolf Research Foundation Inaugural Address given by Richard and Alan Demmerle or could network with other professionals during concurrent breakout sessions. Peter Lelean, a Structural Integrator and clinical masseur from Australia remarked, “The principles of cellular tensegrity, covered by some of the main

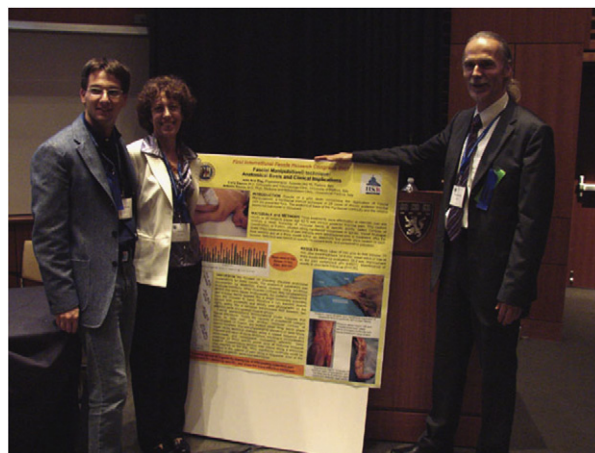


Figure 3 Antonio Stecco, MD, and Julie Ann Day, PT, accept their award for the best poster from conference organizer Robert Schleip, PhD (photograph Sue Seecof).



Figure 4 The Clinician–Educator/Scientist panel (photograph Sue Seecof).

speakers, are directly translatable to the techniques used to restore fascial function as part of structural integration on the macro level. There is clearly much to be gained from further interdisciplinary discussion.”

The existing body of research on connective tissue has generally focused on specialized genetic and molecular aspects of the extracellular matrix. However, the study of fascia as a function of support, as a contribution to human force potential and as a source of pain has been largely neglected.

The First International Fascia Research Congress generated many questions that have yet to be answered. During the final panel session of the 2 days, co-chaired by Partap Khalsa and Leon Chaitow, ND, DO, where clinician/educators (Jo-

1 seph Ardette, MD; Tom Myers, LMT; Diane Lee, PT
2 and Michael Patterson, PhD) asked questions of
3 scientists (Helene Langevin, MD; Jay Shah, MD;
4 Peter Huijing, PhD and Moshe Solomonow, PhD),
5 Helene Langevin, MD, emphasized the dearth of
6 evidence. To many of the posed questions, she
7 humbly answered, “We don’t know.” For many,
8 such apparently negative answers, were a justifica-
9 tion of the intent of the session—to inform
10 scientists of what clinicians and educators need to
11 know (Figure 4).

12 For those who were unable to attend the
13 conference, a DVD recording of the proceedings
14 was shown at 19 US and 14 overseas locations
15 around the world. In addition, a conference
16 proceedings book was made available. *Fascia
17 Research: Basic Science and Implications for Con-
18 ventional and Complementary Healthcare* is a
19 compilation of 16 full-text articles written by the
20 main speakers, that also includes all of the
21 abstracts that were accepted by the Scientific
22 Review Committee. This companion book, as well
23 as the DVD, are available for purchase through the
24 congress website www.fascia2007.com. Plans for
25 the Second International Fascia Research Congress
26 are already underway. Peter Huijing, PhD, has
27 offered to host the next conference at Vrije
28 Universiteit in Amsterdam in 2009.

35 The First International Fascia Research Con-
36 gress was a great success. In fact, it was an
37 important, interesting and fun occasion. Prac-
38 titioners of every stripe were brought into
39 contact with leading clinicians and bench
40 scientists. Listening to people articulate their
41 research was to have the momentary privilege
42 of peering into brilliant minds. One of the
43 delights was seeing how humor, patience,
44 humility and graciousness can coexist with
45 penetrating intelligence. Another was to rea-
46 lize how important thorough literature re-
47 views, technical expertise and uncommon
48 sense are in the research arena. Last of all,
49 it was delightful to bathe in the sea of good
50 will and euphoria that came from the interac-
51 tion of practitioners and researchers at the top
52 of their game.

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