

Spinal Outreach Team Newsletter

Issue 14, January 2011



The Spinal Outreach Team has always had a focus on the years after spinal cord injury and has strived to improve lives now and into the future. In this edition of SPOT's annual newsletter we are also 'taking the long view' and highlighting key messages we have learnt from our research into the years following spinal cord injury. Thanks to all those who have helped contribute to this work. You will also find updates and links to research being undertaken here in Queensland and internationally. If you would like further information on any of the articles in the newsletter contact us at SPOT.

Spinal Cord Injury – The Long View

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'Staying actively involved in life is an important part of staying healthy'



Surviving a spinal cord injury was no sure thing before the medical advances of the 1960s and 70s. Today, health care professionals and health service researchers, look far beyond mere survival, towards assisting people who have sustained a spinal cord injury, to lead long and healthy lives.

Taking the long view of life after spinal cord injury is really what SPOT is all about! That is why much of our research program has focused on long term changes after spinal cord injury.

What we have been pleased to discover is, that in general, people's functional abilities tend not to alter for around 25 years after injury. So, in other words once you have achieved your maximum functional improvement after your injury, it is more likely than not to stay at about this level. For those who do experience changing abilities, whether that be before or after the 25 year mark, the reason behind this change is most likely to be secondary health conditions.

Muscle and joint pain and generalised fatigue were up the top of the list of secondary changes experienced by people in our study. Changes in bladder and bowel habits were also causing problems for people as they aged.

In this respect the public health message being broadcast loud and strong to the general population applies equally to people with spinal

cord injury. Weight management, healthy diet, avoid smoking, moderate alcohol intake, regular exercise and checking your blood pressure are all fundamental to maintaining healthy body systems that will serve you well into the future. In addition, a person with spinal cord injury needs to be particularly proactive about monitoring the health of their skin and kidneys.

Staying actively involved in life is an important part of staying healthy. Our research shows that participating in some type of work, recreation or interest is really important for maintaining a good quality of life. There is no prescription for this. What is meaningful, fulfilling and enjoyable will differ greatly from one person to the next.

The key messages when taking the long view of spinal cord injury are:

- ◆ Things can and often do stay the same for many years after injury.
- ◆ Secondary health problems are often the reason behind a change and can affect quality of life.
- ◆ Being an active participant in life is important for feeling good in the long term.
- ◆ For people with spinal cord injury in Queensland, SPOT is a resource you can access, particularly for information about avoiding, reducing or managing secondary health conditions.

Updates on the management of pain for people with spinal cord injury

There has been significant progress in the assessment and management of people with spinal cord injury (SCI) and chronic pain. Recognising chronic pain as a disease in its own right was one of the main strategic messages of the **National Pain Summit** held in Canberra in March 2010. The hope from this Summit is that chronic pain will be recognised as a major health priority, just like other chronic diseases such as diabetes with its targeted services and funding. To find out more about the National Pain Summit go to: www.painsummit.org.au/

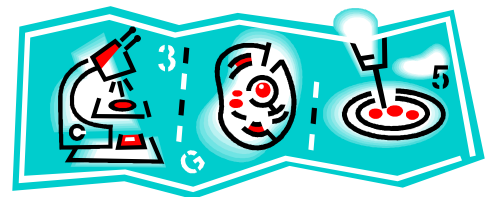
In 2010, the Queensland Government announced it would fund \$39.1 million over 4 years for a new **State-wide Persistent Pain Health Services Strategy**. The Strategy defines a 'hub and spoke' network to support consistent and sustainable persistent pain services across Queensland. To find out more go to: www.health.qld.gov.au/persistentpain/default.asp.

The **International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP)** established a spinal cord injury task force that has since produced an international **classification and assessment system**. This system has improved the consistency and objectivity of assessment of the 4 major types of pain that people with SCI experience:

1. musculoskeletal pain (joint and muscle aches)
2. visceral pain (vague pain felt from organs of the body)
3. neuropathic pain at-level (the band of pain around the body at the level of injury)
4. neuropathic pain below-level (the burning type pain felt widely below the level of injury)

Researchers have discovered that **the brain is involved** in people with SCI and chronic pain. The idea that there are changes in the brain in people with SCI and chronic pain has been determined using new techniques such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Some of this work has involved a group of Australian researchers from Sydney and is ongoing. To find out more go to:

www.pmri.med.usyd.edu.au/index.php



Researchers have also been investigating possible new treatments to assist people with SCI and chronic pain. Recent research suggests that **movement imagery** and **transcranial magnetic stimulation** are 2 new treatment options that may be of benefit in the future. Whilst the research is promising, these treatments are not yet available to add to the integrated toolkit of treatments to assist people with SCI and chronic pain. The toolkit currently includes medication, psychological and physical strategies.

There are some interesting and useful resources for people with chronic pain available from **Chronic Pain Australia**, a not for profit organisation based in New South Wales. They operate a national telephone support and information line, **1800 218 921**. Their website has a number of resources that are free to read and download.

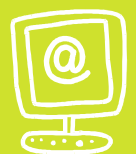
www.chronicpinaustralia.org/resources .

National
Chronic Pain
Information
Line

1800 218 921

International Spinal Cord Injury Research - What's New

With all the research worldwide, it is difficult to keep track of what is currently happening. These websites provide reliable information and will allow you to check out the current research on both cure and improving quality of life for people with SCI. These websites also give you information on what you should know particularly if you are considering participating in a clinical trial.



www.spinalnetwork.org.au/

www.campaignforcure.org/iccp/

www.sci-health.org/



www.icord.org/

www.rickhanseninstitute.org/

www.scireproject.com/

Growing Stronger

The Department of Communities - Disability and Community Care Services (formerly Disability Services Queensland) implemented changes in 2010 to their specialist disability service system. These changes are part of the 'Growing Stronger' program of reforms. The aim of 'Growing Stronger' is to provide simpler, fairer and more transparent access to disability services. The most recent changes include easier access to mainstream and specialist supports through a single point of contact, a new approach to assessing a person's needs and specially trained staff available to help people through the referral and assessment process. A fact sheet on 'Growing Stronger' is available on the Department of Communities website here:

www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/disability/publication/growing-stronger-what-is.pdf.

If you have unmet personal care and other disability support needs contact the intake officer at your nearest Disability and Community Care Area office, all of which are listed on their website at: www.communities.qld.gov.au/disability/. If you require assistance to contact the Department you can phone SPOT's social work service on 34062300 or 1800 624 832 for regional clients.

SPOT Research Update

While SPOT continues to look at the information from our Long Term Outcomes Study, we have also been working on a number of other projects.

The main project is called **Knowledge to Action**, an investigation into the best ways of getting the latest research evidence into the everyday practice of health professionals. We are exploring the different ways of passing on knowledge and skills and so far, we've been looking at **consultancy**, what it is, how it works, and whether it might be a good way of translating knowledge into action.

Seating issues can be a significant issue for people with spinal cord injury. SPOT often works in conjunction with the Rehabilitation Engineering Centre (REC) at Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital to provide custom seating solutions for our clients. SPOT and REC are currently looking at how this joint service works, from the processes and procedures we follow to what difference these customised seating solutions have on the quality of life for our clients.

Queensland Government Supports Spinal Cord Injury Collaboration with Canada

2010 saw the establishment of the Queensland Canada Spinal Cord Injuries Alliance, under the National and International Research Alliances Program (NIRAP), with the assistance of funding from the Queensland Government. It will see the Princess Alexandra Hospital Spinal Injuries Unit partnering with local researchers from QUT as well as Canadian Researchers from the Rick Hansen Institute to study many aspects of spinal cord injury treatment and care. The focus of this collaboration is "Translational Research"- taking new research and using it to make improvements in the health of individuals with spinal cord injury or improve the effectiveness of health care systems to support people with spinal cord injury. For more information email Dr Ben Goss at QUT b.goss@qut.edu.au.



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Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation



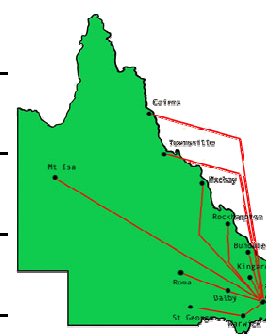
**Queensland
Government**

If you would like to receive information electronically from SPOT, email: spot@health.qld.gov.au and request to be added to the SPOT email list.

REGIONAL VISITS 2011



Area	Week Of
Stanthorpe, Warwick and West	31 st January, 2011
Mackay (South to Sarina & North to Bowen)	21 st February, 2011
Rockhampton & West, Emerald & Dysart	14 th March, 2011
Cairns & Northern Regions (incl. Cape)	11 th April, 2011
Bundaberg & West (Monto & Mundubbera)	16 th May, 2011
Townsville, Mt Isa (incl. Palm Island)	20 th June, 2011
Longreach, Winton & surrounding regions	18 th July, 2011
Roma, Dalby and West	8 th August, 2011
Kingaroy, Gympie & Murgon	5 th September, 2011
Cairns & South to Cardwell, (Tully and Mt Garnet)	10 th October, 2011
Gladstone, Biloela, Theodore and Bundaberg	7 th November, 2011
Hervey Bay and Maryborough	28 th November, 2011



Service Provider Education 2011

In 2011, SPOT's videoconference program will kick off with the topic of skin management. By popular demand the short format presentations will continue. The first videoconference sessions will focus on managing skin breakdown in the community. There will be 2 sessions, the first outlining strategies that can be implemented for wound healing in the community and the second looking at post wound healing care.

Strategies for wound healing for people with SCI in the community	Tuesday 15th February 2011 1.00–2.00 pm
Strategies for post wound healing for people with SCI in the community	Tuesday 1st March 2011 1.00–2.00 pm

We are continuing to review the way we provide education to be sure that it meets the needs of service providers so keep an eye on our website for more news on SPOT's 2011 education program.

If your service would like to request an in-service on a topic of interest related to SCI or if you have ideas for how you'd like to receive education on SCI, contact SPOT, we'd like to hear from you!

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