

OUR TRAVEL EDITION

# SPINAL NEWS

**Spinal Research –  
the next chapter**

**Travelling with a  
spinal cord injury**

**SII Christmas Stocking**

**Cycle the Algarve**

**sii** Spinal  
Injuries  
Ireland  
Support at every stage





# Coloplast Nurse Led Clinic

## FREE Intermittent Self Catheterisation Clinic

Could you benefit from our FREE Intermittent Self Catheterisation (ISC) reviews?



Expert assessment & guidance of your ISC routine



Advice on diet & lifestyle in relation to optimal bladder management



If new to ISC, we can provide you with extra support & advice

To arrange your **clinic appointment, home visit or virtual consultation (phone or online)**, contact our experienced bladder nurses at our Citywest clinic: Phone **087 4624751** or email [nurseteam@coloplast.com](mailto:nurseteam@coloplast.com)

**CLINIC LOCATION:** Unit D, Citywest Shopping Centre, Citywest Business Park, Dublin 24, D24AE22. **HOW TO GET HERE:** Luas Red Line to Fortunestown; Bus route 77A to Citywest Shopping Centre; Exit 3 off N7, N82 to Blessington/Citywest.





## WELCOME

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*This magazine contains real life features and SII does not endorse any products or services listed within.*

This time last year we were hoping that with the roll out of the vaccination programme we would be able to get back to normality however as you know only too well, the year continued to be disrupted.

Unfortunately, we are still living in an uncertain world with the new Omicron variant but we have to live in hope and make the most of it.

2021 saw the second year in which we provided all our services virtually. As people generally are getting used to this new virtual world, more and more of you engaged with us online through our peer get togethers and online education programme and our professional outreach team continued to provide support and advice by phone, email and zoom. Our annual conference supported by Coloplast was very informative and educational with speakers from the healthcare sector nationally and internationally.

Our website, which we developed in 2020, has been a valuable resource to many people but particularly to families of newly injured people.

I would like to draw your attention to our fantastic Christmas stocking draw on the back page. To enter you must post a holiday story on our SII Connect community forum and you will be in with a chance to win a fantastic iPad.

One very positive development during the year was the receipt of a number of National Lottery grants towards a digital roll out programme. This meant that we were able to offer technology to individuals to get them online so they could access our services during these difficult times. We are applying for further grants and hope to expand this programme nationally.

Yet again all our main fundraising events such as the Spring lunch, QBall, Cork Jazz Ball and our challenges, Algarve Cycle and the Tall Ships all had to be cancelled but with the introduction of a Day in my Wheels and the new monthly prize draw we managed to continue to fundraise.

We always talk about the SII community including our service users, families, friends, staff, volunteers, donors, supporters, health care workers and corporates. It is the little things that make a difference and assist SII in continuing to support this community. We cannot thank you enough for the support we have received this year and we hope that in return we have improved our services to you. If you have any ideas as to how we can improve please let us know.

I want to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy peaceful and enjoyable Christmas and best wishes for the year ahead

**Kind Regards**

**Fiona Bolger CEO**

# SERVICES UPDATE

Where has the year gone? So much has happened since our summer magazine. I hope you all had a good summer and got a chance to travel and meet up with family and friends.

We have continued to develop and adapt our services to meet your needs, especially in light of the continuing Covid pandemic. We are committed to providing evidence-based support and information and meeting the variety of unique needs through our education and support programmes.

We have been meeting with our colleagues in the Spinal Unit in the Mater Hospital to ensure all family members are given information about SII and that they get the support they need in the first days of their loved one's injury. We have also been working with our colleagues in the NRH, Cork University Hospital and Beaumont Hospital as well as our allied health care professionals in the community.

We were delighted to see finance allocated in the budget to the implementation of the Major Trauma Strategy. We are following the implementation plans closely and heard from Mr Keith Synnott at our AGM in September. As part of the Public Patient Representative for the National Office of Clinical Audit we contributed to the successful research application "Targeted Review and Amalgamation of Unmapped Major Trauma and Ambulance data in Ireland: TRAUMA".

We hosted 15 education sessions on the medical and practical aspects of living with a SCI as well as caring for your mental health. We know it's not the same as meeting you face to face, but many of you appreciated being able to attend from home and meet with people from all over the country online. We had total of 4,250 interactions supporting you and your family living with your spinal cord injury. Thank you for your feedback as this helps us improve the services for you.

## THE LAST QUARTER IN NUMBERS

2227

TOTAL SERVICE  
USERS

22

NEW REFERRALS:  
(not including family members)

TASKS AND GOALS:  
(with one less Community  
Outreach Officer)

1244

INTERACTIONS:  
(conference, education,  
peer meetings, zoom,  
social media)

4520

*"I just wanted to say thank you for all the contacting and connecting you've been doing this past year. I found hearing from you often very good and was glad you could do so much online."* Patricia

### Peer Support Programme

We've continued our Zoom catch up chats on Wednesday evenings with our peer volunteers. We had changed from the mornings to the evenings to try and suit more people and we did have a lot of people who were unable to join before. We will continue the evening catch ups in January and will do some morning ones in Spring/Summer time in an attempt to suit everyone. Each online meeting has been dedicated to different groups as we know that depending on your age/level/type of injury you have different support needs. We've had chats about all sorts of topics –

seating, equipment, clothing, work, short and long-haul travel to name but a few. Drop in and say hello, share experiences, ask questions, or merely listen in, we'd love to see you in 2022. Details for our 2022 catch ups are on the Events page of our website <https://spinalinjuries.ie/allevants/>

*"I've learned more about my condition through the Zoom calls than any other source"* Chris

The peer volunteers are available to speak to you on a one-to-one basis on the phone. Feel free to get in touch by phone, email or through our website and our peer support co-ordinator

*"I found speaking with Karen a very positive experience. Having the same level of injury, I could ask her a thousand questions. I came away feeling very motivated and very positive"*



We are also planning peer support sessions with our friends in the Dana and Christopher Reeve Foundation for 2022. From our discussions so far, people in the USA have similar issues to contend with as those living in Ireland and they want to share their experiences and hear about yours.

Family members who joined the peer support coffee mornings enjoyed the space for an informal chat, whilst enjoying a cuppa. These coffee mornings were not about agendas, themes or speakers, purely an opportunity for people to share what they want, just to drop in, meet others, say hello or just listen. People joined for as long or as short a time as they wished.

*“I found the webinar most helpful and I’m only sorry that I wasn’t aware of this group earlier in my Dad’s journey. I would certainly attend more of them. Any help at all during this difficult time would help me and of course my family” Sarah.*

## Counselling Support

Our free counselling service has become a great source of support to those in need for ongoing professional support from our experienced trauma counsellor. Anyone who feels the need for additional support at any stage of their post injury journey should contact us and we will arrange the appropriate help. *“Spinal Injuries Ireland has also arranged counselling for my Dad for which we are so grateful. Such an amazing service and much needed at this time”.* Sarah

Huge thanks to all of you who gave your time to share your stories with us at our video shoots this year. You allowed us to use this footage for our prebudget submission advocating for medical cards and to advertise our services for others living with a spinal cord injury. We thank you for your openness and honesty. What an articulate bunch you are.



Thank you to Barry Keane from Brand New Production for his generosity with a free video shoot (virtually) with our Service Users.

## National Lottery Grants

Thanks to the National Lottery Grant we received funding for assistive technology (AT) equipment for many people. This equipment helps service users keep in touch with family and friends in the community and avoid feeling isolated as well as AT for the home. Some of our service users who were lucky enough to win prizes in our monthly prize draw donated their winnings back to SII. Their generosity is gratefully appreciated and the funds were allocated to 6 recipients who needed financial assistance.



Claire Lomas MBE was our inspirational speaker for our virtual audience in November. She discussed her challenges and achievements since she sustained her SCI in 2007. We had a lively Q&A session and Claire hopes to meet us face to face in 2022. We were delighted to hear that some of the patients currently in the NRH were able to tune in and join us.

*“Thanks a million guys, we were a little while trying to connect here in the NRH but got most of it & there was five of us sat in for it. We would like to thank Claire for a very inspirational chat & I know everyone of us here tonight will get plenty of motivation.” Kieran*



For all our upcoming events for 2022 please check our website and social media, and don’t forget to get in touch online, by phone or through the website.

From all the Services team and our volunteers we wish you a Happy Christmas.

# VIRTUAL CONFERENCE 2021 SUPPORTED BY COLOPLAST

Thanks to all who attended our virtual conference in October. We learned so much on the complexities of different types of SCI.

**DAY 1** centered around healthcare with presentations including Pressure Wound Care from Lissy Augustine NRH Tissue Viability Nurse, Autonomic Dysreflexia with Paula Keane NRH Outreach Liaison Nurse, Bowel and Bladder care from Coloplast nurses Saragh Broe and Eileen Lim Joon. This was followed by a panel discussion with the presenters from the NRH and Coloplast.

We had a pain management and medication joint presentation and discussion from the NRH with John Lynch, Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist, Claire Keogh Senior Psychologist and Sheena Cheyne, Chief Pharmacist looking at how important it was for people to be aware of their prescribed medications and the effects they have.

**DAY 2** looked at the practicalities of disability. John Tiernan, Clinical Engineer, SeatTech division in Enable Ireland looked at posture management, pressure area management, different types of chairs and seating. The Right wheelchair for you was from the NRH with Orla Friel, Senior Physiotherapist and Shangdar Maring Rhonglo, Senior Occupational Therapist and looked at the practicalities of choosing a wheelchair, cushions and attachments.

Travel and recreation presentations from service users Samantha Ryan @wheelreviews and Michael and Leona Hennessy Cullen @thestruggleiswheel regarding their experiences with travel in Ireland.

Let's talk about – making your house an accessible home was a collaborative discussion with service users Cathy Dunne, Tim Rice, Gemma Willis, Paula McCormack, Jenny Needham and Kate Nolan around their experiences of adapting their homes to make them more accessible for their needs.

**DAY 3** looked at Research, aging and the family. We started off with speaking with Dr James Guest from the University of Miami about current spinal cord research and then Interactive care with Prof Aine Carroll, UCD discussing the Irish research context.

We then looked at living and aging with a spinal cord injury, with a discussion with service users Conor McGinn and Olivia Shiel alongside Triona McNamee and Mary Gowing from the Living Well programme. The Living Well Programme is a fantastic free resource

## Living Well

A programme for adults with long-term health conditions  
Your toolkit for better health

### Are you living with a long-term health condition?

Examples include (but are not limited to) COPD, asthma, diabetes, stroke, heart conditions, multiple sclerosis (MS), arthritis, cancer, Crohn's disease, chronic pain, depression.



delivered as an online programme by the HSE. Further details are available here <https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/hl/selfmanagement/living-well-programme/>

Brid Keenan, Psychotherapist gave us a presentation on family trauma after a spinal cord injury. The conference ended after an overview of SII peer support with Hilary Keppel, Community Outreach officer

Thank you to the 180 people who participated and gave their feedback helping us improve for the next conference, which we hope will be face to face.

For recordings of the conference presentations please go to <https://spinalinjuries.ie/resource/conference-and-campaign-videos/>

Thank you to the Coloplast team for participating and sponsoring the event.

*"The Conference was so informative. I could relate to most talks. Thank you"*

*"Well done- it was very easy to attend virtually so hopefully you'll do a blended version in the coming years."*



Thanks to all our wonderful speakers and to all of you who attended



# SPINAL RESEARCH, THE NEXT CHAPTER

**In August last year, Harvey Sihota joined Spinal Research as Chief Executive Officer.**

Harvey, who has been living with a spinal cord injury (SCI) as a paraplegic and full-time wheelchair user since 2009 is leading the charity that funds research into treatments to repair and restore the spinal cord. His goal is to take the charity into its next strategic phase - to drive the delivery of effective and meaningful treatments for chronic SCI.

*“I am honoured and excited to be leading this wonderful charity and more specifically to help bring effective treatments and technologies to an SCI community that deserves to see the huge scientific advances yield meaningful change to their lives”* stated Harvey.

Harvey believes that the fields of Neuroscience, Neurosurgery and Engineering are now at a level of sophistication such that we can begin to think about planning for delivery of treatments and technologies. These could make a tangible impact upon life-changing functions like reach, grasp, bladder, bowel, sexual function, trunk stability and walking.

For the SCI community, the real-life impact of research has traditionally been considered distant or intangible and therefore overlooked when planning new models and standards of care.

Over the past decade we have seen massive advances in Gene, Cell, Biomaterials and Neuromodulation technologies to augment, enhance or regenerate the injured spinal cord.

*“We now need to start thinking about planning and accelerating the delivery of real-world impact to our community”* declared Harvey.

Currently, there are many international clinical trials underway, focused on repairing and restoring parts of the spinal cord. These trials range from invasive procedures such as stem cell transplants, epidural stimulator implants and novel drugs being delivered to the cord, to non-invasive procedures like spinal cord stimulation.

Amongst these many clinical trials, Spinal Research is funding several UK-based pilots that are focused on non-invasive spinal cord stimulation. Projects based in Glasgow, Leeds, Stanmore and at Neurokinex sites in the south of England will explore the benefit of stimulating the spinal cord for a variety of functions ranging from bladder and autonomic function, to arm, hand and leg function.

*“Spinal stimulation could be one of the first technologies we’ll see available to the SCI community given that it is less invasive than other approaches. We are already seeing positive data in terms of improvements. If all goes well with the clinical trials, we may see this type of technology made accessible to our community within the next few years,”* enthused Harvey.

Whilst spinal stimulation is just one exciting development, Harvey feels that it is a gateway to the beginning of a new era for spinal cord injury repair and restoration.

*“The science is constantly moving forward. We have so many exciting avenues of research in progress including axon regeneration, cell replacement, plasticity enhancers and brain-spinal cord interfaces to name but a few. The challenge is to ensure we are able support the most promising treatments through to real world application”.*

Harvey feels that whilst we are entering an exciting era it’s incredibly important that the SCI community doubles down on driving the advocacy, awareness and funding efforts needed in order to be able to deliver on these advances in the form of life-changing treatments, sooner rather than later.



## About Spinal Research

Spinal Research ([www.spinal-research.org](http://www.spinal-research.org)) is a charity registered in the UK that funds medical research to develop effective treatments to repair and restore an injured spinal cord. The charity funds research projects around the world and currently has 20 active research projects in its portfolio.

# A DAY IN MY WHEELS



## A great line up rolled with Spinal Injuries Ireland for A Day In My Wheels

25 people from the business, political and celebrity arena took on the challenge to spend a day in a wheelchair on Thursday 30th September. The event kicked off with a tasty breakfast in the wonderfully accessible CHQ, Custom House Quay, where the participants were given their wheelchairs and listened to the eloquent Kieran Fitzgerald who shared his story and some words of wisdom for them ahead of their challenge.

The recruits were then taught some basic wheelchair skills, tips and tricks by Barry Cooke and Jack Shannon Cole, both wheelchair users, before being sent off to navigate their day from a completely new perspective.

Some well-known faces who took on the challenge included broadcasters Lorraine Keane, Andy Preston and Clare McKenna and actor/comedian Joe Rooney. Minister Josepha Madigan and Cathaoirleach of DLRCOCO Lettie McCarthy also put their shoulders to the wheel in support of those in Ireland living with a spinal cord injury.

The inaugural 'A Day In My Wheels Challenge' was also well supported in its first year by the business community. Entrepreneurs Bobby Healy, CEO and Founder of Manna, and Devan Hughes, CEO and co-founder of Buymie were joined by Anna McHugh, Head of Corporate Communications with An Post, John Coroner of Ethos Engineering and David Kerr, Accessibility

Ambassador and Disability Advocate with Microsoft. Bus Eireann were well represented with Allen Parker, Chief Customer Officer and Rory Leahy, Chief Safety and Sustainability Officer both taking on the challenge while Ronan Murphy, Head of Customer Experience represented Irish Rail.

Devan Hughes found that the challenge took an emotional toll on him which he wasn't expecting. *"I had a spinal injury when I was 18, and the doctor said that an inch in the difference and he would have been fitting me for a pair of wheels. It makes me think about how different life could be."*

Jack Ryan carried out his role as an Estate Agent with Sherry Fitzgerald from the chair and recounted *"It was the small things that accumulated throughout the day that knocked my confidence. For example, I did a viewing and I wasn't able to go upstairs, so I was talking to the client in the attic from the ground floor. I found it a little bit demoralising. These added up and by the end of the day, my confidence was rattled"*.

Renowned PR Queen Valerie Roe knew that it would be a difficult challenge and enlisted the help of her friend Olan McGowan as a guide. Olan, a wheelchair user, sustained a spinal cord injury in 1995 in a diving accident. Together they negotiated their way around Dublin City.





By taking on this challenge, the participants got a glimpse into what life in a wheelchair is like, while also helping to provide one-to-one support for people with a SCI and their families from the moment they are admitted to hospital for as long as it's needed. Ahead of the challenge Phil O'Kelly, Head of Fundraising, explained *"we call it a challenge for a reason. The participants will be challenged by accessibility issues in workplaces, shops, transport and facilities. They will learn a different way of dealing with everyday situations such as opening doors, crossing roads, and even moving about their own home. The experience will provide a whole new perspective on how people in wheelchairs are viewed and treated."*

Having taken on the challenge himself Phil told us *"I found it a challenging experience. Not the accessibility issues, I was expecting that, but I found my resilience being tested on a regular basis. I found the amount of small decisions I had to make was draining and on several occasions I found myself shying away from doing something as I thought it would be too difficult. I gained a whole new level of respect for people who use wheelchairs. I don't think I ever properly appreciated the levels of resilience, determination and mental strength involved. I do now."*

Carole Ann Clarke, Managing Director, of I am Here, is right when she says: "You shouldn't actually have to get into a chair in order to make a statement to provide the right supports, the right infrastructure for people with disabilities, cos it could happen to any one of us."

I think that this is key. When we listened to the stories yesterday, someone falling off a wall, someone having an injury through sport and I think as a society we need to be accepting that these things happen and that we should all be aware."

Carole Ann, took the dart with Lorraine Keane to and from the CHQ, having been given the heads up that they needed to give 4 hours notice for a ramp to be available. In addition to the obvious physical side of the challenge it was the emotional element that took Carole Ann by surprise *"Loneliness, vulnerability, losing that feeling of spontaneity, but on the positive side, feeling really loved by my family, the kindness of strangers, the empathy of strangers. It was a real labyrinth of emotions."*



We are hugely appreciative to each and every one of the participants. Not only were they brave enough to be the first to take on this challenge in its inaugural year, but they each paid or fundraised a minimum of €5,000. We plan on making this an annual event which grows and expands nationwide but in the meantime to everyone who donated, took part or sponsored someone else to take part we are really grateful. You raised a fabulous €131,649. The money is being allocated to our professional outreach and counselling programmes.





# COMMUNITY AND FUNDRAISING NEWS

2021 has been another tough year for our fundraising. We had to cancel our Spring Lunch, Q Ball, Cork Jazz Ball, Summer BBQ, our Algarve Accessible Cycle, the Tall Ships Adventure and our Christmas Lunch (which we were hoping could temporarily replace our Spring Lunch). This was a big blow to us but thankfully we've been able to offset some of the losses in other ways. We introduced a new BBQ in October called the Q BBQ, which raised almost €20,000. We're so grateful to everyone who came along to support the event, bought raffle tickets and auction items, and to Merrion Cricket Club and Paul Quinlan for facilitating it. The food and venue were perfect, the weather behaved itself (albeit a bit chilly), and everyone had a great time. Keep an eye out for next year's event. It really is a great day (and night!) out.

We'd like to thank everyone who is taking part in our Monthly Prize Draw. This was a new campaign we launched at the start of the year and we're currently on track to raise over €30,000 by the end of the year. Every €7 ticket is a big help so if you'd like to take part, please just visit [spinalinjuries.ie/raffle](https://spinalinjuries.ie/raffle). It's supposedly a 1 in 10 million shot to win the National Lottery, whereas our raffle is around 1 in 500, so you know it makes sense!

We ran a small exclusive raffle amongst our supporters who were due to attend our Christmas Lunch which raised €13,300. Thank you to all of you who participated and to those of you who donated prizes. We are very grateful.

We'd also like to thank all our Community Fundraisers this year. Everyone who ran a fundraiser was a big support to people living with spinal cord injuries across Ireland. In particular I'd like to mention Fiona D'Arcy, Mark Walsh, Grainne Sugars (all of whom we mentioned in our previous newsletter), and also Claire Broderick, who ran the Joe Duffy Half Marathon for us this November. On the 10th of August 2017 Claire's father suffered a spinal cord injury following a farming accident which resulted in paralysis from the neck down. As Claire puts it: "His accident was one of the darkest moments my family has endured. They guided us during my father's two year rollercoaster of a journey. From his time in Tallaght Hospital to the National Rehabilitation Hospital and finally home. There are not enough words to express our appreciation for how Spinal Injuries Ireland helped my father and my family." Well, it's us who can't express our appreciation enough now, Claire. Thank you so much for your support this year and for

raising an incredible €6,600 and counting. We really appreciate it and are even more delighted to hear that your Dad is back running the farm.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Paul McClatchie, Tim Hurley & Ken Dooley who took part in the Paris2Nice Cycle Challenge for us this year. Despite the very late notice that the event was going ahead in 2021, the three went above and beyond, fundraising well over the mandatory target and ultimately raising over €17,000 for people with spinal cord injuries. Thanks so much lads, you've been an incredible support in a difficult year. Photo – P2N Team at finish Line



We are so grateful to Blackrock Investments who awarded us a grant of €5,000 for our counselling service, as well as giving us a large donation earlier in the year. We'd also like to thank Neal Caldwell QS for their donation of €1,000 in June and the Quinn Foundation for their €2,000 in September. O'Brien Lynam Solicitors kindly donated €8,000 in lieu of hosting a company celebration for their 21-year anniversary in business and to Vistra, who chose us as their charity for their Christmas Donation 2020 and awarded us a substantial sum, we are so grateful. Thanks also to The Good Summit who, having had one of our service users, Jack Kavanagh, speak at their Summit, awarded us a €500 donation from the proceeds (thank you too, Jack!). Thanks also to the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council HUG staff charity for their donation of €1,000. And finally, a sincere thanks to Niall Gunne for his incredibly generous donation of €23,000. Donations of this magnitude make such a difference to the people we work with.

From all of us here at Spinal Injuries Ireland, to all our supporters, a huge thank you.

# TRAVELLING WITH A SPINAL CORD INJURY

While travelling with a sci does require a bit more planning, do not let that put you off. There's a world out there waiting for you to explore. We have put together some tips and advice to help you take the plunge.

## Selecting a Destination

- Research the accessibility of the destination and not just the accommodation. Opt for a central location where possible. Social media can be a great place for research, with many accessible travel blogs and forums available. Some travel operators cater specifically for people with disabilities. You will find lots of links on our website.
- When selecting accommodation, it is a good idea to request photos of the accessible bedrooms and bathrooms. This way you can see for sure if they will suit your needs.
- If booking tours, email ahead advising of your requirements so that your needs can be catered for when selecting routes and visits. Tour guides are usually very happy to compromise with you if you let them know in advance

## Flying

- To book assistance, contact your airline, tour operator or travel agent a minimum of 48 hours before your departure. It is best to do this at the time you're booking your holiday. Different people have different needs. So, it's important that you also select the level that suits you, when you book.
- Bring your medication and an emergency kit that will get you through a couple of days on board with you in case your luggage is temporarily delayed.
- Do not restrict fluids on a flight, even if it seems tempting when you're worried about bladder management – dehydration is never good.
- On long haul flights, look after your skin. Tight clothing can cause marks that can lead to pressure sores. Bring a pressure-relieving seat cushion, and wear loose comfortable clothes.
- Check all your mobility aids are in good shape once you're reunited with them. If there is any damage, report it immediately. Do this while you are at the airport mobility assistance service, so you can get a reference number you can use to claim on your insurance or the airline's insurance.

## Looking after your bladder and bowels while travelling

- If travelling long haul, you can increase the drainage capacity of your indwelling catheter by attaching a two-litre leg bag.
- Secure your catheter with a catheter securement strap to stop it being pulled when transferring from your day-to-day chair into the aisle seat.
- Keep a RADAR key on you – this is a scheme that allows disabled people to access locked disabled toilets themselves.
- Use bottled water in places where the tap water is not safe to drink. This can help avoid diarrhoea and vomiting.
- If you are prone to UTIs, talk to your doctor about bringing prophylactic antibiotics with you.
- Remember that your body may take a while to get used to a new routine in a different time zone. You may also be eating different types of food, which can affect your bladder and bowels.
- Empty your bowel the night before flying to prevent needing to use the toilet on the plane.
- Pack spares of any equipment or medication you may need for your bladder and bowel – you never know if something could get lost while travelling.

## Luggage

- Depending on your injury, it's up to you how you deal with luggage. You may clip a rolling suitcase to the back of your wheelchair with a carabiner or you may have a PA who will help with your luggage. Find out what works for you.
- When travelling by car, you can carry more luggage. If you're flying, then you may need to be more cautious about what you take.

## Travel Insurance. What do I need?

It is essential to have travel insurance in place before you leave. Many travel companies only offer basic cover, so you should ensure that the policy meets your requirements. Before you buy your insurance, you must inform the company that you have a 'pre-existing medical condition'. Contact us at [info@spinalinjuries.ie](mailto:info@spinalinjuries.ie) if you would like information about insurance providers that cover pre-existing medical conditions.

## What is the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)?

The EHIC enables you to get necessary healthcare free of charge, while you are on a temporary stay in all of the countries in the European Economic Area. Application for the card is through the HSE website.

The best advice we can give you when it comes to travel, is just do it! Plan it, but do it!





# Your journey starts here



OCS Ireland have been working with airports, airlines, and disability user groups to deliver award-winning passenger assistance services for passengers with reduced mobility and hidden disabilities since 2008.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were assisting almost half a million people each year using our PRM (Passengers with Reduced Mobility) service in Ireland at Dublin, Cork and Belfast International Airports. With travel beginning to open again for many, we feel it's important that everyone knows that air travel is accessible for all, and that we are here to help.

Our service provision to passengers with physical and hidden disabilities covers the entire airport environment. We assist and care for passengers from the moment they arrive at the airport, through check-in, security, shopping and relaxing in the departure lounge, to boarding the aircraft. We provide a fully supportive passenger assistance service for both departing and arriving passengers, including for those who have pre-booked their assistance with us via airlines (approximately 85% of PRM passengers) and those who arrive without notification.

Our customer care agents are trained to the highest standards, they are knowledgeable and equipped to manage passengers who need support, with dignity and expert care, and can respond to a passenger's changing requirements during their time in the airport. Our teams are trained to recognise and support passengers with

hidden disabilities, including travellers with dementia, autism and Asperger's syndrome, mental health issues, stomas, and hearing, visual and sensory impairments.

We want passengers to enjoy their time at the airport, reassured that they are being well cared for by our colleagues.

## Our operations

Dublin Airport (DUB) have been receiving OCS Ireland PRM services since 2008 and in 2016 was named Best Airport in Europe for Accessibility at the ACI Europe Awards. Dublin Airport is comprised of two terminals, with flights to 191 destinations in 42 countries operated by 47 airlines. The airport provides a wide range of facilities to meet the requirements of passengers who have disabilities and/or reduced mobility and our colleagues will assist you in every step of your journey, ensuring you take full advantage of all that the airport has to offer.

In 2019, OCS Ireland invested in new Ambulifts, Minibus, aisle chairs and a large-scale purchase of new wheelchairs which improved our ability to respond to and meet the complex range of services required by the diverse PRM passenger profile at Dublin Airport. That same year we received over 90 written compliments, detailing how our services exceeded the passenger's expectations and gave them the confidence to continue to travel through the airport.

“OCS deliver exceptional customer service, taking the highest levels of care for all passengers using our PRM service. We understand what is required from us and use innovative technology and highly trained resources to deliver operational excellence every day.

Our PRM services are not only in operation in Ireland at Dublin, Cork, and Belfast but also Internationally. Our goal is to ensure that all passengers using our service have a safe and seamless journey while in the care of the OCS team.

We are a people business, who are passionate about our core values of Caring, Safety, Trustworthy and Expert. We believe that these values are reflected in the PRM service we deliver throughout Ireland & UK and across the globe.”

**Derek Murphy,**  
Director of Aviation Services UK & Ireland

Cork Airport (ORK) infrastructure is unique in that it provides a straight-line approach to the operation of a PRM service. ORK terminal layout and passenger journey through the terminal is relatively straightforward, but anyone with concerns around using air travel due to mobility or disability issues shouldn't hesitate to contact us for assistance, we are here to take the stress and worry out of their journey. Our PRM service user figures demonstrate that prior to the pandemic, more and more people with reduced mobility were utilising accessing air travel. In 2019, we assisted 26,653 PRM passengers while in 2018 we assisted 24,543 PRM passengers, representing an 8% increase in PRM assistance provided at Cork Airport.

At Belfast International Airport (BIA) OCS have been delivering PRM services since May 2010, assisting people with mobility issues through BIA's busy operating environment. We assist several hundred PRM passengers travelling to Lourdes, during May and July each year and we regularly work with our local Knights basketball team on their trips, with some flights carrying more than 15 wheelchair users.



## Investment where it matters: you

We use the latest technologies to improve our service to our users. Our new real-time resource-allocation system Avtech, ensures our teams, and our equipment are where they need to be to best meet passenger needs. The system provides automated communications between the control room, the system and the Customer Care Agent, vehicle drivers and other equipment operators regarding the allocation of tasks.

Passenger, flight, gate, stand and timing information is sent directly to the Customer Care Agent/Drivers' tablet by the operations controller or automatically by the system. The tablet device automatically records time stamps at various stages of our passengers' journey through the airport both inbound and outbound so that we can identify any issues or delays concerning each passenger. Avtech is now operational across all OCS PRM operations in UK and Ireland.



Our task allocation system allows all our PRM staff to have real-time information delivered directly to their tablets when undertaking tasks. The system also allows staff to record any issues or delays encountered, and evidence this by a simple survey taken by the passenger at the end of their journey. This survey is done by the passenger ticking one of three images, a "happy face", "not-so-happy face" or an "angry face". Once these icons are ticked, the passenger's choice is locked by the system and cannot be edited. If the "angry face" is ticked, an SMS is sent to the Customer Service Manager's mobile phone. The Customer Service Manager can then meet with the passenger and discuss their issue immediately.

## Collaborating with Relevant Organisations

OCS Ireland work with a range of organisations and charities and collaborate with local community and national disability groups to receive regular insight into the small or big changes we can adopt to make our processes better and improve the travelling experience for PRM passengers.



This collaboration has also led to the creation of our bespoke Disability Confident Training Programme for our Customer Care Agents, developed in conjunction with all airport mandatory training and best practice guidelines from different disability user groups, such as Irish Wheelchair Association. This training ensures our PRM staff have awareness, confidence and knowledge when dealing with PRM passengers allowing them to assess each passenger's mobility requirements and provide the relevant level of assistance specific to each PRM passenger.

In June 2017, OCS/BIA launched the Hidden Disability Lanyard, originally designed to support passengers at UK airports and left unpatented to prevent any barriers to its adoption. This is a distinctive sunflower lanyard that passengers can wear on their journey through BIA which identifies them as a person who may require a more support or understanding, and may need more time to process information, prepare for check in, or go through security screening.

## Booking Process

Presently we receive PRM bookings via airline bookings and via email requests, but passengers can also present at our customer service desks in each airport. To request passenger assistance directly with us you can simply email [prm@ocsireland.com](mailto:prm@ocsireland.com) with your details and we'll get back to you directly.

In order for us to deliver the most effective service possible, passengers requiring assistance should request assistance through their airline at the time of booking their flight, or notify their airline, travel agent or tour operator with details of their assistance requirements at least 48 hours in advance of the departure of their flight. It is very important that PRM passengers ensure that they contact their airline, travel agent or tour operator directly as their onward travel may be affected otherwise by the safety rules an air carrier applies to the carriage of persons with reduced mobility.

OCS are currently collaborating with a new and innovative company to trial a PRM booking app that can be downloaded onto your phone and will allow users to make PRM assistance bookings worldwide along with a host of other benefits.

## PLANES, TRAINS AND ..... TRAVELLING WITH A SCI.

At this stage, almost 10 years since my acquired incomplete spinal cord injury I think I know the Support Services at Dublin airport well. And they are one of the best services in Europe, in my opinion and experience!

Back in 2012 on my first foreign trip there was a lot to figure out, and a lot to deal with in coming to terms with this permanent change in how I would go about my work and life.

I find the OCS people a pleasure to deal with – in the early days even collecting me from the car park when I travelled alone. And going above and beyond to get me to a flight on time, when I was severely delayed in traffic getting to the airport. So, what have I learned that now makes it a smooth process?

1. Book the support service when making the flight reservation...it's the airline that informs the support services in Ireland and at your destination.
2. While you get to skip the security queue, using the service means being at the airport earlier so there's enough time to get you to the gate.
3. Have details about size, weight and battery power of any mobility aid you are bringing with you. Some airlines request this information when you check the box 'bringing your own wheelchair', but they might still ask!
4. If there's a connecting flight involved check your lay-over time to ensure you make the second flight.
5. Be prepared for waiting!

As 'a walker', I find train stations a bit harder to navigate ... anyone parking at Heuston Station in Dublin and walking up to the entrance barriers will know how long the trek can be! Or finding an out-of- service lift to cross the tracks, or an un-staffed station without any indication as to which platform the train will come in on can add to stress. But then there's the super friendly staff member who lets you through the exit barrier to take the short cut, or the other travellers who go out of their way to make sure the train waits for you, to brighten up the day. And while kindness is good, appropriate systems are better.

Before Covid 19 I took a lot of flights each year for work...so have developed my own ways to handle the thoughtless and sometimes intrusive ways of fellow passengers. And as we all know that's part of a bigger, other story on how people with disabilities can be de-personalised or ignored. Meantime, I say let's stay travelling and living our lives.

**Patricia Prendiville.**



# TRAVEL TIPS FOR TRAVELLING WITH AN SCI FROM A WALKER POINT OF VIEW

Brian Lawlor is the Peer Support Coordinator with Spinal Injuries Ireland. Brian sustained a C4-C5 Incomplete injury following a cycling accident in 2012 and walks unaided.

In my experience of travelling with an injury, it is essential to do a little more research before I set off, especially if I'm leaving the country. When booking a flight I always make sure I get an aisle seat; not just because I'm tall but it also means I'm not clambering over someone to get to the bathroom.

When setting off on the day, I make sure to wear clothes that are simple to adjust on the off chance I need to remove or adjust clothing going through security, such as belts, shoes, jackets with metal zips etc. As we all know, sometimes you can be walking for a while to get to your gate. As a walker, it helps if the carry-on bag I am carrying is easy to carry on my back or pull behind me and is not too heavy. The last thing you want is to be exhausted before you get the gate.

If you are a walker and you are unsure if you can walk to the gate comfortably, don't be afraid to book an airport buggy. That's what they are there for. Some people, myself included, can be stubborn when it comes to asking for help or wanting to appear more able than you are. In these cases, I'll just say that it is okay to ask for help. People will be only too happy to assist you. It might be asking someone for a hand getting your carry on into the overhead locker, which I've had to do, or asking a passer-by to see if they can help you get the front wheels of your wheelchair up onto the lip of the path.

When I get to my destination, I try to estimate the distances to and from the sites or attractions I want to see. Whether it is a short walk from my hotel or a quick bus or taxi ride, to and from. With the limited energy I have, I want to enjoy my outings without driving myself into exhaustion. So, I make sure to take plenty of breaks, even if it's just a five minute sit down to rest the legs, or get an ice-cream. If I do feel like I'm getting a bit overwhelmed, it's nice to know I am with someone that understands my situation. When travelling with friends, family or loved ones, you shouldn't be afraid to say "I need a break". After all, these are the people that know you the best and will understand the most. When travelling to new places with limited mobility and energy, there is always a bit of a learning curve. You will be trying to figure out distances to travel and the dimensions of paths, steps and doorways. My advice would be not to worry too much. The point of a holiday is to relax and enjoy yourself. So do just that!



Sandra Loftus is a peer volunteer with Spinal Injuries Ireland. She was diagnosed with Guillain Barré in 2003, caused from complications from food poisoning. Sandra is a walker.

## Sandra's tips for travel with a disability during Covid.

- When booking firstly make sure your passport is up to date and you have a valid Covid vaccination certificate. As few of us have travelled abroad in almost two years it is quite common for your passport to have expired unnoticed so make sure you check it and apply now to renew it rather than in a panic when you need to travel as there are some delays.
- Check out each country that you are travelling to see what their entry requirements are in relation to Covid. Each country will have different requirements and they are constantly changing so ensure you are getting the most up to date information.
- When booking your flight inform the airline that you will need assistance, i.e. a wheelchair or the mobility little shuttle cars that transport you to your gate.
- When booking your seat on the plane it is important to note that you cannot sit near an emergency exit.
- When booking accommodation ask for a ground floor room or a room near a lift.
- Check out the area to see if there are many steps in the resort or if it's exceptionally hilly before you book. You don't want to end up frustrated by a lack of accessibility or physically exhausted by over stretching yourself. Choose a location that suits your particular needs.
- Bring your parking permit as it works abroad if you hire a car or are a passenger for disabled parking zones. Sandra has used it both in the USA and Europe.
- Always go through Fast Track Security in airport. You don't need to pre book or pay – just show your parking permit.
- I find Trip Advisor a great app to check out accommodation and restaurants where you want to stay from a value, accessibility and quality point of view.

# Conversation with Philip Quinlan about all things travel



Philip sustained a C6 complete injury in 1999 and is quadriplegic.

## Do you think your holidays are different now than they would have been had you not had your accident?

I definitely have to be a bit more organised now. My accident was in July 1999 and I was booked to go to New York for the Millennium with my girlfriend at the time and a load of mates and we decided to go ahead and make the trip. I'm so glad I did. I was still a patient in the hospital so it was a risk and trying to get travel insurance was really expensive. I did it but I remember not really putting any thought into it. We stayed in a mate's apartment. It was totally inaccessible. There wasn't an accessible bathroom. We just winged it. It was great to do it and realise that I could travel. I even blagged business class on the way over and back which was great.

Nowadays, an accessible bathroom where you can have a shower is vital. I'm past the age of grinning and bearing it. Everything else I can handle. It's frustrating that hotels don't put photos up of accessible bathrooms. Different people have different requirements so putting up a photo means people can see exactly what's available. That's why I set up [disabledfriendlyhotels.com](http://disabledfriendlyhotels.com) to be honest, to list the accessible features in a hotel. I generally ask hotels to

send me photos. Earlier this year, despite having seen photos of the accessible bathroom in a hotel, when I got there it was really too tight for me to get my shower chair in as there was a fold down shower chair so it didn't really suit me. A wet room works fine for me because I bring my own shower chair.

## Other than accessible accommodation what other factors do you take into consideration when selecting a destination?

For me I love the sunshine and the heat. Food is a big thing for me as well. Things like direct flights make a real difference. Flight times are important too. Afternoon flights suit me best as my morning routine is quite slow. City centre is great too. Even getting in and out of taxis takes its toll so to have a complete break from that for a week is fantastic. To just be able to wheel about the place easily to restaurants and beaches is brilliant. Somewhere that is flat too helps. I went to Lisbon on a stag and it was a total disaster. I arrived a day late. The apartment was fine but it was halfway up a hill of cobblestones. Even getting out of the car onto the hill was a disaster and when I phoned the lads to help, they were all too hungover. I wouldn't race back there. Rome can be tricky too with all its cobblestones but I still go there for the rugby. Newer more modern cities tend to be much better. If there's an old and a new town, opt to stay in the new.



I went to Japan for the Rugby World Cup and that was hard. Despite booking a year in advance I didn't manage to secure an accessible room and the rooms were tiny. There are so many people and even the restaurants are quite small with little space. It was hard but I'm a massive sports fan so it had to be done. Barcelona is pretty good. They had the Paralympics there so they made a big effort and you can wheel around the city centre easily.

### San Sebastian, Spain, is exceptional

An amazing place to go is San Sebastian. A mayor or politician or town planner must have been a wheelchair user because it is just so accessible. In each beach cafe there is a table assigned for a wheelchair user. There is a sign on the ground similar to those in a disabled parking bay. Even in the old town there are lifts down to the toilets in little tapas bars in 300 year old buildings, which must have cost fifteen to twenty grand. It has a beautiful beach and everywhere is really flat. There are lovely restaurants with great food. It stands out as an exceptional holiday destination for a wheelchair user.

I stayed in the NH Collection San Sebastián Aránzazu in an accessible room with a big wet room in the new town and I could just wheel down the road to the most beautiful bay – a perfect semi circle with a little island in the middle. It's really gorgeous. You should go. I actually got stuck there in 2010 because of the Icelandic volcanic ash cloud.

### Does anywhere else stand out as being particularly good for wheelchair users?

Nowhere stands out as being exceptional. I travel quite a lot. It's all about ease. For example, I travel to London by myself. I fly and get the train into the city and then a black cab to a mate's or a hotel. They also have the UberACCESS which is brilliant. With my level of injury it's all about ease and to not have to always use a transfer board is great. Actually, Tenerife is pretty good as well. They have made a lot of effort. There are ramps everywhere and great access onto the beach. I think they have realised it is a good niche market worth tapping into and there were a lot of wheelchairs there in January.



America is good, Australia is good. South Africa is dreadful but I go there quite a lot and just park myself in the hotel. Amsterdam is great, lovely and flat and I wheeled along the cycle lanes. I stayed in a hotel called the Golden Tulip and it was good.

San Sebastian is really the only place I can think of that I went "wow, this is unbelievable and must have been planned and designed by a wheelchair user".

### Any other tips and Tricks?

Yes, the Eurostar is fantastic for wheelchair users. You can book the cheapest ticket (approx. £39) but the only place wheelchairs can be accommodated is the Business Class carriage. So, for an economy fare you get access to the lounge beforehand, a beautiful meal on board and plenty of drinks. So I book the cheapest ticket and go a couple of hours in advance and have a few drinks in the lounge and fill my bag with booze. I then get on the train and have a lovely meal and more drinks and you get to bring a plus one. Generally when we go to the rugby in Paris, we go to London, spend a night there and then get the Eurostar to Paris.

It's always worth asking for an upgrade when flying. I've blagged it a few times saying I need more room because of leg spasms. If they have room they will often accommodate you. You get to skirt through security as well which is nice so there are some perks.

I have a list of things I bring with me. Always keep your meds with you in case bags get lost. Also an emergency kit in your carry on is essential to get you through a couple of days in case your luggage does get lost.

### Do you find the services in Dublin airport good?

Yes excellent. In some places it is very hit and miss. In South Africa women lift you off. I'm not that heavy but it wouldn't be ideal if you're 20 stone to have two women trying to lift you off. Very uncomfortable for everyone. In other places you might get there and there is only person. But yes, in Dublin airport, it is very well organised.

### What advice would you give someone who is newly injured or hasn't yet taken the plunge to travel with an SCI?

Just go for it. It will be so worth it. I'm so glad I went to New York back in 1999 just months after my accident. I haven't looked back.

**Philip is very well travelled and has offered to chat to anyone who has any questions about travelling with a spinal cord injury. Phone 01 6532180 or email [philip@spinalinjuries.ie](mailto:philip@spinalinjuries.ie)**



# SPINAL INJURIES IRELAND'S FULLY ACCESSIBLE TALL SHIPS ADVENTURE 2022!



Join us for this once in a lifetime opportunity to sail the high seas in a genuine Tall Ship as we voyage from Southern England to Dublin via the Northern French coast aboard the SV Tenacious. We already have eighteen people registered but have space for another dozen so please get in touch and let us know if you'd like to find out more about this wonderful experience.

## Itinerary

It is always hard to give a clear itinerary in advance as so much of the detail is weather dependent but as a rough guide:-

**Saturday 18th June Poole to Saturday 25th June Dublin**

- 18th** All participants fly from Dublin to Bournemouth. Transfer from Bournemouth to Poole Board the SV Tenacious mid afternoon Welcomes, Safety Briefings and an evening alongside to become acquainted
- 19th** First day at sea; Training, setting sails and helming. First night at sea
- 20th-24th** Journey from Poole to Dublin stopping at several ports along the way (TBC)
- 25th** Celebrations as the SV Tenacious and crew dock in Dublin. Disembarkation in Dublin.

## Cost and Fundraising

To participate each participant must raise a minimum of €4,000 (a deposit of €400 followed by €3,600). We will work with you to ensure that you reach your target easily. We will also be on hand to provide you with materials for your fundraising. Your flights, transfers between airports and the port, accommodation and full board are all included.

## Food Glorious Food

The food on board is plentiful and often praised. A professional cook and a cook's assistant produce three cooked meals a day and make cakes, biscuits and scones for elevenses and afternoon tea (both known as 'Smoko' on board). In addition, you can help yourself to fresh fruit and if you are still peckish during your night watch there are always some 'night rations' to help you through.

We can cater for special dietary requirements – just remember to give them to us in advance.

## Life on Board

Life on board really is about joining in and getting involved. Everyone is seen and treated as equal.

Everyone has a role to play and contributes to the best of their ability. Don't worry if you have not sailed before – most people step on to Tenacious with no experience of sailing a tall ship, so you will not be alone. Our professional seafarers and volunteers will support you through all the tasks involved and there will always be an experienced hand to ask for advice or support.

You will be put into one of four teams, called Watches. The four Watches are called Forward Port, Aft Port, Forward Starboard and Aft Starboard. Each Watch includes an experienced Watch Leader who will co-ordinate the team under the guidance of the permanent crew. Between the Watch Leaders and Permanent Crew, they will ensure that you are given tasks that suit your individual strengths and capabilities.

The four Watches take it in turn to be responsible for the various tasks required to sail and run the ship, including keeping watch. Those tasks need to be completed all day and through the night.

**To register your interest please visit [spinalinjuries.ie/tallships/](http://spinalinjuries.ie/tallships/) or phone Phil on 01 6532180.**

# KEEPING IT MOBILE WITH @thestruggleiswheel

We were delighted that Michael Hennessy Cullen and his wife Leona, aka @thestruggleiswheel agreed to do a presentation for this year's conference.

Michael's T9/T10 SCI injury following a road traffic accident in 2005 affords him a unique and informed insight into the everyday challenges facing a wheelchair user in accessing everything from hotels to beaches to hiking trails all around Ireland and equally, if not more importantly, what himself and Leona can or cannot access collectively as a couple.



With a lot of travel being curtailed and staycations being much more popular due to Covid 19 the couple set out to explore the Wild Atlantic Way and the webinar they presented reviewed three vastly different types of accommodation from three different counties. They also reviewed the accessibility of local attractions in the three counties.

They reviewed a mid range hotel, a 5 star hotel and a mobile home and to their surprise the mobile home rated highest.

The Green Acres camping site at Loop Head provided the accommodation during their County Clare trip. Perhaps not an obvious choice for a wheelchair user but this mobile home left the couple almost lost for words when praising it describing it as "top of the range" with a *"host of inbuilt accessible features better than most hotels" – "fantastic space for the chair" when describing turning circles etc.*

Despite it having the size constraints of any mobile home the bathroom facilities were described by Michael as being "second to none". Clever design at this unusual accessible accommodation seem to showcase what is possible with foresight and planning. There were low rails in the wardrobe that Michael could reach, a basin you could actually roll under with no blocking towel rail and grab rails hanging over the bed. *"The shower seat was spot on, the ramp going in, the wide doors, everything was top of the range and better than most of the 4 and even 5\* places we stayed"* explains Michael.



Leona jokes that they would buy the mobile home if they could afford it. Actually, I'm not sure she is joking.

Tracks and trails in County Clare immediately bring the Cliffs of Moher to the front of one's mind. While a wheelchair accessible viewing point is provided at the attraction, it is at the top of a hill with a challenging steep gradient - even with a clip-on motor assisting. After all the effort of getting to the viewing point there's what Michael describes as a "difficult and disappointing viewing experience" to be had. Leona describes how the Kilkee Cliffs have good accessible parking and provide a much better experience with much less effort and more reward when you get there. This is a perfect example of the value of sites such as @thestruggleiswheel for research where you can gain invaluable information and tips before undertaking any trip.

They also visited Liscannor and Kilrush. The walled gardens were easily to get around with compact gravel rather than the deep gravel that so often is found in walled gardens which is usually impossible to negotiate. Leona loved the Rockshop in Liscannor, wide and spacious with accessible parking and toilets and a lovely studio type shop.

All in all their new experience of a mobile home in County Clare proved to be a huge success.

View Michael and Leona's webinar describing these three vastly different breaks on our website [spinalinjuries.ie/resource/staycation-exploring-the-wild-atlantic-way/](https://spinalinjuries.ie/resource/staycation-exploring-the-wild-atlantic-way/) or by scanning the QR code and make sure to follow their extensive travels and view accessibility updates on their Instagram and twitter feeds





# A FERRY MERRY HOLIDAY!

Like most of the Irish, I love to go abroad to sunny climates. After a gap of two years I decided it was time to venture off to foreign lands again.

I took the ferry from Dublin to Cherbourg as it's handy to have my adapted van on holidays. I showed my passport & papers, a choice of evidence of vaccinations, a PCR or an Antigen test negative within 72 hours. Five minutes later I was on the boat... a speedy advantage of Priority boarding due to being disabled!

I accepted the offer of assistance as I know the pull on the cabin door is challenging enough even when not juggling a sliding board, pick up stick and bag. The cabin including the bathroom was spacious and comfortable. Everywhere on the ferry was wheelchair accessible. The staff in the restaurant were very helpful and eager to give me any assistance required. After a relaxing crossing I presented the same paperwork to the French authorities and off I went on my 14 hour drive to my destination planning to meet a friend in Bordeaux for lunch on the second day.

*Disaster!! For the first time ever my Satnav wouldn't work..... no amount of pleading would persuade either app to work. In hindsight I wondered why I hadn't borrowed my brother in laws satnav!!*



I stopped at the nearest garage, bought a selection of maps and arrived at my hotel exhausted and hours later than intended. I would never have found it but for two very kind French ladies who, when asked for directions, said to follow their car and found it for me.

Tolls are also very challenging when driving an Irish car solo..... I didn't come across any manned (or womaned!)

20



tolls, sadly. Thank God for my trusty pick up stick. By the end of the first day I'd developed a new skill. I would put on my hazard lights, roll down the passenger window, retrieve or insert a ticket and pay with my debit card, all using my pick up stick. When discussing this challenge with friends later, a Dutch friend helpfully suggested reversing through the toll (lol) 🤪



There are lots of small places to stop on the way where there are toilets and picnic benches as well as the big petrol stations. When refuelling I would just go in and ask for assistance. Somebody would come out straight away. Lunch with my friend, Lydia, the next day evolved into her meeting me at a roundabout just off the motorway and being my human satnav to her home. Wonderful to have such a terrific friend in the right place! I set off the next day very well fed and entertained with their satnav programmed to my destination. Just for curiosity I tried my satnav again and yes, of course it worked... after being on strike for two days.....

I drove over the Pyrenees with spectacular views and arrived in Catalonia, Spain. I've been going there and staying in the same place since 2005 so I know all will be fine there. On the way back I didn't book a hotel as I wanted to drive for as long as possible and it was the end of October. At 22.30 I saw an Ibis hotel and stayed there for the night.



*I stayed there for three months instead of three weeks as planned, enjoying the lovely climate, scenery, lots of socialising, renewing old friendships and making more.*

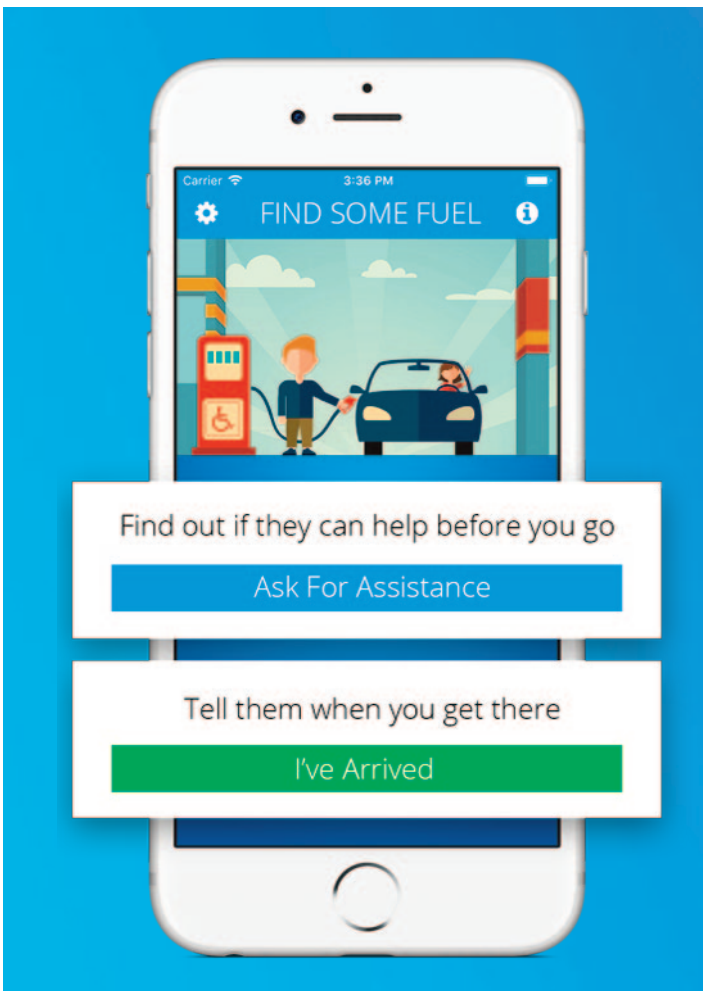
Like here, if going indoors a mask had to be worn. Unlike here no evidence of vaccination was ever requested. I did have a problem requiring a visit to the GP and subsequent nurse visits. I just joined the queue and waited about 20 minutes to see the doctor. I was staying very close to the health centre in the village. Everything was covered by my European Health Insurance card. The nurse phoned the pharmacy and explained I needed medical supplies due to my extended stay.

Once I got there I wondered why I had been a bit apprehensive about going. It was certainly worth the effort involved despite the hiccups along the way. Long lunches with friends beside lakes and mountains and on the Ramblas, shopping in the markets, getting water from a fountain, long drives through spectacular scenery; I can't wait to do it all again.

*If you're thinking of going just go.... it's well worth any effort involved.*

**Karen Farrar**

Karen sustained a T5 complete injury in 2004 following a fall while on holidays. She is a power and manual chair user and is one of our peer volunteers.



## FUEL SERVICE

Service user and peer support volunteer Conor McGinn contacted us to tell us about a new app he had been using.

“I recently discovered this Fuel Service app for smartphones which enables disabled drivers to make contact with petrol stations in advance to receive forecourt assistance with refuelling their cars. I have used it myself and have been very glad of the assistance when on a long drive down the country”.

The whole scheme is explained easily at the app website [fuelservice.org/ie/](http://fuelservice.org/ie/)





## We're delighted to announce a new event for 2022. Next year, from May 2nd to 8th, Spinal Injuries Ireland and the IRFU Charitable Trust are co-hosting an accessible cycling challenge in the Algarve.

Whether you're a seasoned cyclist or a social cyclist, with a choice of 3 routes of varying distances available each day (ranging from 20kms – 100kms+) this incredible experience will cater for all levels of experience. This cycle also fully caters for people with a spinal cord injury and there will be a mixed route for hand cyclists and cyclists every day. Professional cycling coach and double Paralympian gold medal winner Mark Rohan will be managing the cycle and has promised to put us all through our paces, whatever our abilities!

- 5 days cycling, a different route each day
- a choice of 3 routes of varying distances available each day to cater for all levels of experience and ability (over 100 Kms per day for advanced cyclists).
- support van with spare parts, nutrition and collection option available each day.
- both able bodied and disabled cyclists welcome.

It's also a great way to support people living with a spinal cord injury, and their families. All monies raised will be split between Spinal Injuries Ireland and the IRFU Charitable Trust. Spinal Injuries Ireland will put your donation towards our Community Outreach and Great Day Out programmes for people living with spinal cord injuries across Ireland. The fundraising ask is €3,750 and this covers all logistics including flights, accommodation, meals, and bike hire. We also want this to be a social cycle as well as a challenging one, so a partner's rate is also available if anyone's partner would rather lounge by the pool or take in the sights each day and then meet back up with the crew for our evening meal.

**Fundraising:** €3,750 (€300 non-refundable deposit plus €3,450 additional fundraising)

A reduced cost of €2,000 will be made available to partners of participants. Partners will not take part in the cycling and are free to explore Quinta and/or enjoy the hotel on a daily basis.

**COVID-19:** all health and safety measures will be in line with EU guidelines with a designated Covid Officer to ensure compliance.

### WHAT'S INCLUDED:

- Return flights Dublin to Faro
- Transfers to and from airport and group activities.
- 6 nights shared accommodation \* and full board at the 5 star Wyndham Grand Algarve
- 5 days cycling including \*\* bike hire, guided routes, support van, rest day group activities (see provisional itinerary on website)
- Farewell meal on the last night in Bovino Steakhouse

\*single rooms are available with a single supplement

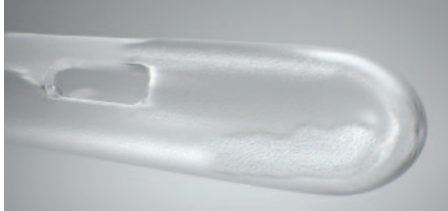
\*\* specially adapted bikes and hand bikes will need to be supplied by the participant

If you're a cyclist, we'd love to have you on board for what promises to be an amazing experience in the spectacular Algarve. To find out more, visit [spinalinjuries.ie/cycle](https://spinalinjuries.ie/cycle), let us know you're interested and we'll get back to you with all the details. Looking forward to cycling with you!

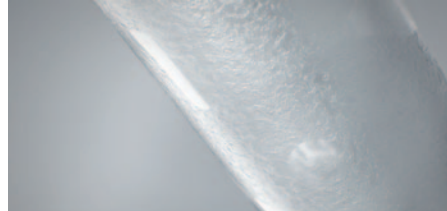
The truth is:

# Not all coatings are the same

Patients need a coating that protects the mucosa from the risks of damage, complications\* and UTIs. **Some of the common pitfalls can be:**



**Dry spots:** Where the coating doesn't adhere to the catheter during insertion or withdrawal.



**Short dry-out time:** Insufficient hydration may cause the coating to dry out over time and become rough or sticky.

\*Urethral bleeding (haematuria) and strictures

All SpeediCath catheters have a unique hydrophilic coating, featuring our **Triple Action Coating Technology**:



### Stays bonded

during insertion and withdrawal due to a proprietary base-coat that is covalently bonded to the catheter surface for an even coating without dry spots.



### Stays smooth

because the polymer top-coat enables excellent water absorption for low friction, smooth insertion and reduced discomfort.

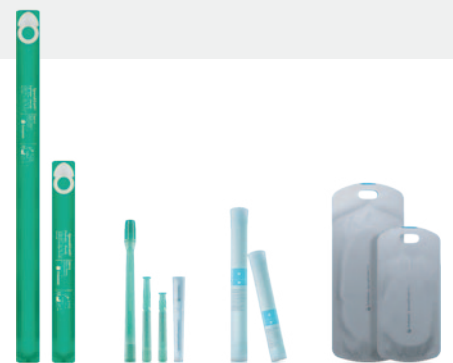


### Stays hydrated

with a special water-based solution that swells the coating and makes it instantly ready to use.

## SpeediCath®

With Triple Action Coating Technology  
for the protection of the urethra



Ostomy Care / Continence Care / Wound & Skin Care / Interventional Urology  
Coloplast Ireland, Unit D, Citywest Shopping Centre, Citywest, D24 AE22. [www.coloplast.ie](http://www.coloplast.ie)





## Win an iPad

There's nothing like the voice of experience, someone who's "been there and done that and is now wearing the T-shirt"! This is especially true when it comes to travel and holidays.

Have you been somewhere that you'd highly recommend or are you a frequent flyer who knows the do's and don'ts of booking flights and airports inside out?



**Christmas Stocking**

**sii** Spinal Injuries Ireland  
Support at every stage

- 1 POST**  
a travel highlight, story or recommendation
- 2 ENTER THE DRAW**  
to win a prize from our Christmas Stocking

**sii** Spinal Injuries Ireland  
Support at every stage

### Staycations

Did you enjoy a fantastic holiday at home here in Ireland this year, tell us and let us tell the SCI community about it.

### Destinations far and wide

Have you experienced the holiday of a lifetime, share it with us and let others know.

### Family holiday

Is there somewhere you've been that was just the perfect family holiday exceeding everyone's expectations? Tell us about it.

### Top 10's

Accessibility and what to look out for, what to pack, what to ask before booking, your tips about equipment and medications.

## We want your tales – The good the bad and the ugly!

### What's in the Stocking?

- ★ A brand new 10.2 Inch iPad
- ★ A €100 voucher for Chariot

CHARIOT is an Irish-owned brand of Lifestyle Apparel, designing quality sustainable and ethical clothing. We make clothes that are inclusive and eco-conscious by nature. Our motto is: work hard, play hard, adventure hard - whether you sit or stand!

So, what are you waiting for? Logon to the Travel and Holiday Section of our SII Connect Forum and share your recommendation, holiday story or anything travel related and you will be automatically be entered into the draw. It's that easy. You'll also get to see what everyone else is sharing and get some recommendations so it's a win win! Go on, get posting. Closing Date 28th January 2022. <https://spinalinjuries.ie/forums/forum/travel-and-holidays/>

