

SPINAL NEWS

SUMMER 2022

Thailand in a Powerchair

Bernard Healy talks us through his trip

Spinal Research

Neuromodulation Explained

Let's Talk about Sex

Upcoming Webinar Series

Tall Ship's Challenge 2022

Read how our sailors got on



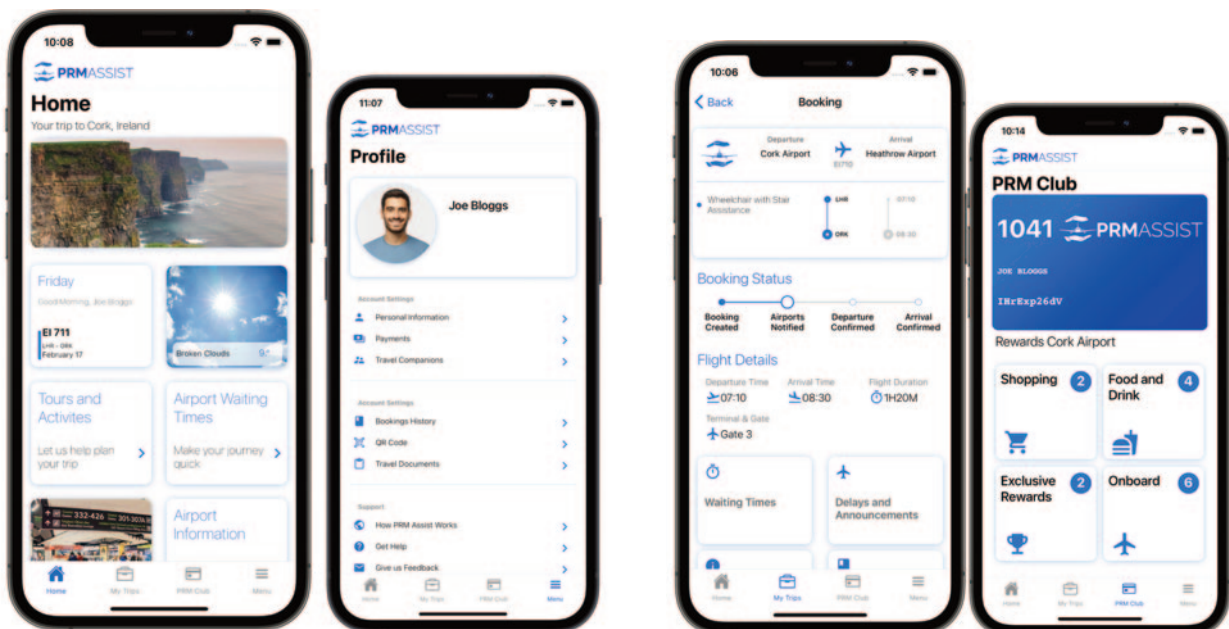


Improving the Airport Assistance Journey



PRM Assist is aiming to make the world a more accessible and inclusive environment by introducing a fully accessible mobile application for airport assistance users.

The mobile application will create a streamlined booking process with live confirmation that the booking request has been received. In addition, we want our users to have an app that allows them full control over their journey and reduce the anxiety often associated with airport travel for those with additional accessibility needs. We have done this by allowing the passenger to manage their booking so they can add a short message for the airport assistance provider/airline, add an airport arrival time and view assistance desk wait times.



We also wanted to add a feature to your application to make it more interactive, we have done this through the 'tours and activities' tab and the 'PRM club'. Tours and activities allow you to view amenities within the area you are travelling to and book them through our tours and activities partner. The PRM club will give you access to exclusive airport discounts that have been uploaded to our application by the airport themselves. Within the PRM Club, you will also have the option to purchase additional equipment for accessible travel.

Perhaps the most important aspect of your PRM Assists mobile application is the ability to 'review your trip'. This feature is how you will provide critical feedback to airports and service providers, so any issues you have faced do not repeat or any positive experience you have had is continued in operation.

PRM Assist, as mentioned above is fully accessible in line with WCAG (web content accessibility guidelines) AA standard and is available to download currently on both the App Store and Google Play store.

We want to ensure that this mobile application is built with its users and not for them. Contactus@prmassist.com can be contacted with any product feedback on how we can improve the application to ensure greater accessibility and inclusion.



WELCOME

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

There is a sense of normality since the roll out of the vaccination programme although we are still living with Covid. We have been delighted over the last couple of months to restart our clinics in the NRH Out Patients Department. It is great having the opportunity to meet you in person again.

Over the next few months you will have more opportunities to meet particularly with our roadshow 'This is my Life' in September. Please don't forget to complete your invitation included in the magazine and return it in the freepost envelope which is also enclosed in your magazine. By attending the 'This is my Life' roadshow you can let your voice be heard about services for people with a spinal cord injury in addition to meeting the SII team and your peers in your local area. We could not possibly run this roadshow without the support of Coloplast who will also be in attendance with their nursing team.

We continue to run all our services by phone, email and zoom and our education programme is run by webinars. In particular, our peer support programme is a very popular event when we run our coffee evenings online on Wednesdays. We will be running another series of them for all types of injury later in the autumn.

For the first time in over 2 years, we have been able to run some of our fundraising challenges and events. In April it was fantastic to greet over 400 of our supporters in the Intercontinental Hotel in Ballsbridge. It was a phenomenal success thanks to the support of our sponsor 'The Institute of Education' and for the very generous support by everyone who attended.

In May we ran our inaugural 'Algarve Cycle' in conjunction with the IRFU Charitable Trust. This was an accessible cycle and was a huge success for all the participants and thank you for the fundraised income. In June our long postponed Tall Ship challenge was sailed from Poole in the UK to Dublin. Always a very positive experience for participants who never thought they would go on a boat for a week after sustaining their injury not to mention being a very valued member of the crew. Watch out for our very exciting Tall Ship adventure for 2023. it will be very exciting and adventurous.

Finally, over the next 6 months, we will be gathering information to assist us in developing our next strategic plan. It is so important that we get your opinion so that we can provide the best services possible to you. In addition to the roadshow we will also be emailing you a survey and we ask that you please take the time to complete it. If you are not online and would like a posted copy of the survey, please email info@spinalinjuries.ie or phone 01-6532180

Looking forward to seeing you all over the coming months

Kind Regards

Fiona Bolger CEO

SERVICES REVIEW

2022 has been a busy year and with restrictions lifting we have expanded our services by holding bi weekly clinics at the Outpatients Department of the NRH and relaunching the SII RIB Niamh for the summer season. Our education wellbeing programme and peer support programme is planned with a range of virtual sessions to address the variety of information needs for you and your family. The Services Team continues to engage with all service users by phone, email and zoom calls

We attended our first in person conference and took an information stand at the All-Ireland Conference on Integrated Care. We were able to share the work of SII with allied health care professionals. We also were invited to share the work of SII with the Health Science Students in University Limerick. Cork University is our next stop in September! Later in June we attended the European Seating Symposium in Croke Park and were delighted to present on our services at the event.

We are co-applicants on a research submission to HRB from University Limerick entitled "PATHWAYS: Life Wellbeing -Forming Transitional Primary Care Pathways for People following Spinal Cord Injury who use wheelchair and seating assistive technology."

We remain committed to elevating the voice of people living with a spinal cord injury and submitted a Service User's experience to the annual report to the National Office Of Clinical Audit – Major Trauma.

The DFI invited us to share an example of PPI work with UCD. We presented our work about the family experience of SCI with the DFI and partners. We co-produced the piece of work with Dr Sarah Donnelly (Assistant Professor of Social Work, School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice). This was funded by the UCD Public Patient Involvement (PPI) IGNITE programme. Our Community Outreach Officer Emily McIlveen is representing SII on the DCU Exoskeleton PPI.

Representatives from our Services Team are in attendance at Dr Smith and Dr McDonagh's out patient clinics in The NRH every Tuesday and Wednesday 0900-1300 hours.

We welcomed the newest member of the team Denise Lennon. Read about her first month on page 6

Education health and wellbeing programme by David Fitzgerald, Community Outreach Team

We kicked off our education programme in the new year with a Mental Health First Aid Course SJOG accredited

training delivered by SII service user, Ciaran Allen. (<https://www.mhfaireland.ie/>). This was followed by an alternative holistic therapy course delivered by SII service user Seamus Murphy – The Healing Body Clinic. We also ran a 6-week SII-Aware life skills programme tailored for SII service users in February. (Aware accredited training, again delivered by SII service user, Ciaran Allen.)

These courses, together with a vocational training course plus our very recently delivered Assistive Technology (AT) information course, delivered in partnership with our good friends at Enable Ireland, were all delivered online via webinar and proved very successful in attracting attendees from all four corners of the country. This previously untried method of delivery is one small positive from the recent Covid restrictions which will undoubtedly be here to stay.

SII educational courses have always been delivered as a collaboration with relevant partner organisations and the move online has proved no different. In fact, the move online has, if anything, increased collaboration with a prime example being our recent vocational course covering "returning to work". There are many bodies with an interest and expertise in this subject and we were delighted to be able to bring together SII, the IWA and the NRH together with Southside Partnership to deliver this important course. Not only would this logistically have proved to be a much bigger challenge had the module been a traditional pre-Covid face to face event but the scope of potential attendees would have much reduced due to geographical considerations.

Collaboration with partner organisations is very positive but when there is, as there was with this year's SII-Aware life skills programme, a coming together of these organisations along with the expertise of SII service users delivering and facilitating first-class, top-quality training, that's when there's maximum engagement and satisfaction reported from participants.

Looking forward we are planning an exciting and interesting schedule of classes and courses for service users along with even more collaboration with our professional partners. We would love to hear from you if you have any ideas or suggestions about topics you might like to see covered – topics that might be particularly of relevance to those living with a SCI. Even better if you, like Ciaran Allen or Seamus Murphy, have a skill or expertise that you wanted to share with your peers and deliver a relevant course of your own. Suggestions are always welcome at info@spinalinjuries.ie

Peer Support Update by Hilary Keppel, Community Outreach Team



We have continued to have our regular zoom “Catch ups” for different groups of people with SCIs. We know that depending on your age/level/type of injury you have different support needs, so each online meeting is dedicated to different groups. These have proved to be a valuable source of information and social contact for people both throughout Covid and will continue as long as people are interested. We would love to see you and hear how you have been doing. Please don't feel daunted as there is no pressure to say anything if you would prefer to just listen in the first time, you can leave yourself on mute and leave your camera off, there's no pressure! The next catch ups are available on the Events Calendar on the Spinal Injuries website spinalinjuries.ie. Just click on the event and you will see the link to register.

“It was so good for my head to talk to others in the same boat” Angela

“The session was very good, it allowed me to listen and empathise with others” Stuart

If you feel you would like to speak with someone with personal experience of Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) either as a person living with a SCI themselves or as the loved one of a person with a SCI please get in touch with your Community Outreach Officer or phone 01 6532180. Have a look at the Peer Support Volunteers page on our website to see who you would like to speak with. If you have been advised to have a procedure or just want advice on something our peer support volunteers will have “lived experience” and are very happy to listen and share their knowledge. Speaking with someone who is “further down the road” can be very helpful to anyone newly injured or their family.

SII support at the NRH Outpatients Department by Brian Lawlor, Peer Support Coordinator

Many of our service users know that Covid 19 has had a drastic impact on the services provided across Ireland, not just for Spinal Injuries Ireland but for many different organisations spread across different industries as well. To the disappointment of many, we couldn't access the NRH for health and safety reasons. Our work, like many organisations, moved online to platforms such as Zoom or over the phone, so to be back speaking with our service users and families face to face once again rang true for me that SII was doing what it does best.

With some of the restrictions behind us we are delighted to be meeting services users and their families at Dr Smith and Dr McDonagh's outpatient clinics on Tuesdays and Wednesday each week.

Come and meet us at the NRH OPD and get advice from the expert Community Outreach team and peer support to help you adapt to your life with a spinal cord injury. So, if you find yourself down in the NRH outpatient department, give us a wave. You might just see myself or one of our outreach team and we would be only delighted to include you in all the services SII has to offer, whenever you need it.



Family Outreach by Emily McIlveen, Community Outreach Officer

Spinal Injuries Ireland hold “Catch ups” online for Family/Friends and Carers of people with a spinal cord injury. The catch ups are held in the evenings, and they are an opportunity for participants to share or gain insight to the various challenges that might arise, when caring for someone with a SCI. They are a form of support from people in similar situations, as the best support for family members of people with a spinal cord injury comes from their peers. Encouragement and support is given to those who participate and bonds are formed in this collaborative approach online, enabling people to feel less isolated and more positive about what the future holds.

If you have stories and updates on living with your spinal cord injury, we want to hear from you. Every one of your experiences can give hope and strength to others.

Mary Scarff’s Stress Management series for Family members and Carers:

A “stressor” is any event or stimulus that causes stress. However, what serves as a stressor for one person may not be the same for another.

In Mary Scarff’s series of Stress Management, she discusses what stress and anxiety is. She helps us to understand our flight, fight or freeze response and how trauma can affect

the human body. She explores how the nervous system reacts to trauma and how to become aware of what makes us anxious and how to manage these stressors. Everyone is different and reacts differently to stress and that is why we all have different coping mechanisms, they allow us to function. After acquiring a spinal cord injury, changes in relationships may occur, understanding boundaries is an important part of being aware of these changes. Personal space is an important aspect for everyone. As a person with a spinal cord injury, family or a carer, it is important to take time for yourself. This will allow you to engage with other parts of your life that will enhance healthy relationships.

Relationships can come under pressure, during challenging times, therefore, it is about exploring different ways of managing conflict and when they are appropriate and helpful. Mary introduced the concept of listening skills and how to encourage them in others.

Quality sleep permits one to function more readily, live longer, feel happier and enables the body to work more efficiently. Mary discusses how important sleep is and how one can take steps to support a good night’s sleep. If we need to make changes in our lives, how we can adapt. Mary promotes a programme of self-care that can help to reduce stress. Each session has started and ended with breathing exercises, in order to ground oneself, to avail of the experience to feel peace and calmness.

Denise Lennon

My new role as Community Outreach Officer (Munster)

Taking a role with Spinal Injuries Ireland was also going to take me out of my comfort zone. Having previously worked in an organisation for 15 years this was a huge leap for me to take. I had worked on the frontline, straight through most of the pandemic while completing my college course. Moving to a position which was predominantly online was extremely challenging. Working from home was something I was not used to and I am happy to have moved into a brand-new office which is a great space in a great location.

Since beginning my position as a Community Outreach Officer with Spinal Injuries Ireland, we have collaborated with many organisations. Our collaborations with University of Limerick, University College Cork and CUH are all well established. We made an in person presentation in University of Limerick with a physiotherapist in March. We met with the trauma team in the CUH which has just become one of our major trauma hospitals and we are hoping to link up with CUH again to present to the team. We are also hoping to present in University College Cork in September 2022 to physiotherapy students.

We are also working in partnership with organisations such as the National Learning Network, The Voice Project with Independent Living Movement Ireland, West Limerick Independent Living and many other organisations which provide a great support for people with spinal injuries. These organisations all have similar values to us here in Spinal Injuries Ireland, empowering, reliable, compassionate, and are informed in best practice.





Every four years Spinal Injuries Ireland runs a survey to ask you, our service users what is your life like living with a spinal cord injury in Ireland and what we can do to assist you or represent you?

This survey is used in order to develop our next strategic plan so we can provide the best services to you.

This survey will be emailed to you during August and we ask that you complete the survey so that we can gather as much information as possible.

We will also be running meetings around Ireland during September and we ask that as many of you attend as possible. We will be inviting local politicians and media and these meetings will give you the opportunity to voice your opinion on services to people with a spinal cord injury.

At the meetings you will also have an opportunity to meet your Community Outreach Officer and the Spinal Injuries Ireland team and more importantly it will give you the opportunity to mix with other service users in your area.

This roadshow is kindly supported by Coloplast and their nurses will be attendance so you can discuss any personal care issues that you have.

Please complete the form enclosed with the magazine and return to us in the freepost envelope.

We are looking forward to meeting you in person!

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Tues 6th Sept | Dublin | Maldron | Tues 20th Sept | Cork | Silver Springs |
| Wed 7th Sept | Portlaoise | Maldron | Wed 21st Sept | Waterford | Woodlands Hotel |
| Tues 13th Sept | Galway | Clayton Galway | Tues 27th Sept | Donegal | Radisson |
| Wed 14th Sept | Limerick | Castletroy Hotel | Wed 28th Sept | Dundalk | Crowne Plaza |



SEX AND SEXUALITY

What is a psychosexual therapist and how might psychosexual therapy help me?!

I am often asked what my original motivations for wanting to become a therapist were.

I became spinally injured in 1996 as a result of a motorbike accident, which left me paralysed from my waist at T12. It was in the spinal centre that I became aware of people asking about relationship and sexual issues very early after their injury. I was one of them and went home with an indwelling catheter in, feeling very unsexy. My partner and I took a long time to manage the adjustments. Whilst I was an in-patient we were able to talk to the psychologist at the spinal centre, once home it was very difficult to find specialist help and we started to find out just how much had changed for us as a couple.

As a result of my personal experience I decided to train as a relationship counsellor and then specialise as a psychosexual therapist with the objective of helping people like myself. My client group consists of both individuals and couples looking for help with various sexual dysfunctions affecting their relationships. I work with both able and disabled clients but have developed a particular expertise with sexual and relationship issues that a SCI may bring with it. I feel it is necessary to emphasize how important sexuality is after a SCI, in that this aspect of the relationship shared by a couple, and the fears of singles is often neglected, with the focus being on the physical dysfunction. It is critical to the process of renewing the sexual experience that clients accept that their sexual experience is now going to be different. Some tasks that I give help to guide the couple in an exploration of alternative ways of being intimate and reaching sexual fulfilment, which don't necessarily rely on intercourse. Clients do need to be very open about their sexual feelings and be willing to try new ideas or ways of behaving. I ask clients to do some reading and try exercises at home as part of their program. Providing me with feedback on their experiences allows me to design a personal program for a positive way forward.

Currently I work actively with The Contemporary Institute of Clinical Sexology as a Tutor, STEPS Neurological Rehabilitation, Sheffield facilitating staff training in accordance with NICE guidelines and clinical work with their residents. I work for CESA - Cauda

Equina Champions Charity and help with questions on behalf of Enhance UK who facilitate a Love Lounge for many one-off questions.

I provide articles and advice to The Back Up Trust and SIA

I take private referrals from Spinal Centres, GP's, Case Managers, Solicitors and SHADA (Sexual Health and Disability Alliance).

Join our series of virtual Relationships, Intimacy and Sexuality Webinars facilitated by Michelle Donald PGDip.PST qualified Psychosexual Therapist



If you are the client what is the process.

At some point after a SCI you will have many questions and may feel the need to discuss sexual matters and relationship issues with a specialist such as myself.

As a psychosexual therapist I will assist you with the impact that your SCI has had on your sexual lives. I will help you deal with how you feel about yourselves sexually and how you feel about your intimate relationships. I will help you talk through how the SCI has impacted on your sexual experience. A range of techniques will be spoken about to help you understand and reconnect with your sexuality. You may not be currently in a sexual relationship, but if you are it is more helpful to attend together.

We will discuss what is possible or not regarding your inability to get or maintain an erection or achieve an orgasm. We can discuss many issues including fear or anxiety about sex, loss of sexual desire and difficulty communicating with your partner. Sometimes these problems can be addressed with just a little information or reassurance and one or two sessions is enough. Typically people will need more time. If you are in a relationship, you can both talk about your feelings and be involved in goal setting. You will both need to talk about your relationship, your sex lives, and the changes you have experienced. I understand how anxious people are about voicing how they feel about this. We then formulate a plan on the best way to proceed. You need to be as open about yourselves as possible and be willing to try new ideas or ways of behaving. You will be asked to do some reading and try some exercises at home and provide feedback on your experiences from which we can develop a positive way forward.

An example of an exercise that proves useful for many couples is body mapping. This exercise emphasises intimacy and sensual pleasure. For example, you may lay on a bed while your partner caresses parts of your body. For each area your partner touches, you describe how pleasurable it is on a scale of one to ten. The process helps people rediscover their own bodies and their partners bodies. I have found this helpful as it enables clients to better understand what has changed for themselves and for their partner in knowing which areas can now be comfortably touched. Many partners become tentative about touching and are confused about where is more pleasurable or more painful. Body mapping facilitates communication and incorporates an element of fun!

Here are two examples of my client work. Minor changes have been made to protect the privacy of these clients

Male in his 40's, recently spinally injured.

A 42 year old man had fallen downstairs at his home and sustained a SCI from his navel down. He was admitted to the Spinal Injuries Centre and underwent five months of rehabilitation, as his injury is from his navel (T10) he cannot experience any sensations below this area so not only is he unable to feel he can now only sustain a reflex erection, as his psychogenic erection has been lost. That is, he can obtain an erection through local touch but cannot maintain it through thought or any visual

stimuli, so he will not be able to maintain it long enough for penetration. He was assessed and offered a medical treatment approach to his erectile dysfunction. Treatment seemed successful for the mechanics of his erectile dysfunction as his erections are initially maintained. Subsequently, it became apparent that both partners were struggling to cope with the idea that he could not feel and struggled to move as he once did. His wife felt hurt and became critical of her husband. This caused him to feel increasingly emasculated and a loss of desire developed in both partners. Sexual activity decreased and soon after the medication would no longer maintain his erections.

The psychosexual approach offered to this couple, included specifically tailored sex education and cognitive behavioural therapy to help with their reactions to changes in sexual functioning. They explored issues around masculinity, the meaning of erections, ejaculation, and the reliance on medication as experienced by both partners. It also addressed couple communication and issues of adjustment and loss.

Sex therapy approaches were used to allow this couple to become more comfortable and relaxed in each other's presence, to be naked and to begin touching again, to overcome awkwardness and performance anxiety. It offered specific strategies to increase arousal and help the couple to make decisions about the use of and choice of medication. It enabled exploration of sexuality in the absence of erections and sensations, along with techniques to overcome loss of spontaneity and anxiety.

Female in her 30's, spinally injured for four years.

A 32-year-old woman had been involved in a car accident four years ago. She had sustained a spinal cord injury from T4 (chest down). She felt very unhappy about the way she now looked, as she could not control her stomach muscles and had a 'pot belly'. Her legs had become thin and flat and she could not sit up straight. She worried about how she looked in her wheelchair as she had lost her self-esteem and now disliked her body. She had issues with spasms causing problems with bladder leakage and now wears a catheter attached to a leg bag for urine drainage. She felt she was no longer a 'real' woman and in addition worried about being unattractive to her partner. This had led to marked avoidance behaviours such as of being naked, of touching herself, of being seen naked or touched by her partner. As a consequence of her level of injury,

she suffered from vaginal dryness and she had also lost her breast and nipple sensation. As a consequence, the couple's relationship was deteriorating. The husband developed erectile dysfunction as he found it difficult to stay aroused due to his wife's apparent lack of interest, her changed body, and the increasing amount of conflict. She tried to raise some of these concerns with her GP. On one occasion she was told that she should just focus on getting on with life and not think about sex. The second time, she was told that this might just be a price she had to pay for staying alive, that she should get over it. As a consequence of the lack of necessary support she then referred herself to my private service.

The psychosexual approach included cognitive behavioural work on body image and cognitive work focusing on a re-appraisal of fears and assumption. Guided self-focus exercises were used to help her overcome avoidance behaviours and an exploration of couple dynamics took place.

The sex therapy approach helped the couple to re-establish communication and intimacy once again. They could now relax together and feel comfortable being naked and touching each other again. It offered specific treatment approaches to maximise arousal and helped the couple to explore different alternatives for adapting, maintaining, and maximising intimacy. A personal program was devised to address the partner's erectile dysfunction.



Relationships, Intimacy & Sexuality Webinar Schedule (7 - 8 pm)

Sep
14th

Manual Wheelchair Users

Sep
21st

Those who are walking, have Cauda Equina or Transverse Myelitis

Sep
28th

Powerchair Users

Oct
5th

Partners of Service Users

Sensitive subject some may say?

Recently, there has been a lot of publicity regarding the use of sex workers. I had a conversation with a young man who wanted to know what he was capable of before trying to guide a new sexual partner. After discussing the matter with his family, he spent time with a female sex worker who helped him to explore his own body and he became aware of his own capabilities. This improved his confidence which allowed him to engage in a new relationship. This is a very personal decision and not everybody is comfortable with it but for some it is a very helpful experience.

If you decide you would like direct personal help from Michelle Donald (She/Her) she can be contacted for a totally confidential conversation, to arrange an appointment via Zoom, email her at michelledonaldpst@btinternet.com

Note: there may be a waiting list of a few months

Pauline Sheils, Clinical Nurse Specialist, NRH 01 235 5288 also offers expert advice in this area and is based in Dublin.

One to Watch

Netflix

Take a look at Sex Love and Goop!

NATIONAL TRAUMA SERVICE – REHABILITATION

By Caitríona Begley
Rehabilitation Project Facilitator
National Office for Trauma

The National Trauma Strategy ‘A Trauma System for Ireland’, published in 2018, recommends that an inclusive trauma system be established, where trauma-relevant facilities and services are networked and co-ordinated in the care of injured patients along standardised pathways.

The Strategy sets out that trauma services in the future trauma system will be delivered by two regional hub-and-spoke networks, the Central and South Trauma Networks. The hubs of each network will be the Major Trauma Centres (MTC). Major Trauma Centres will provide the highest level of specialist trauma care to the most severely injured patients on a single hospital site and will act as the highest point of escalation for trauma services within their respective networks.

The Mater Misericordiae University Hospital (MMUH) will be the MTC for the Central Trauma Network, Cork University Hospital (CUH) will be the MTC for the South Trauma Network. Work has commenced to establish major trauma services in both of these hospitals. The integration and inclusion of paediatric trauma into the Trauma System has commenced. The New Children’s Hospital will provide major trauma services for children. Development of the paediatric networked elements of the Trauma System will ensure that children’s needs are considered at all stages of the trauma care pathway. Within each network, a number of Trauma Units will deliver more general trauma care to the majority of patients who do not need the specialist expertise of a Major Trauma Centre.

Clear protocols and procedures, developed with the National Ambulance Service, will ensure trauma patients are brought to the appropriate hospital in line with their care needs. In some circumstances, patients with injuries requiring the expertise of an MTC but faced with a travel time deemed unsafe by pre-hospital staff will be taken to the nearest Trauma Unit for rapid stabilisation and subsequent transfer to the MTC for definitive care. The National Trauma Strategy sets out 45 recommendations for the organisation of trauma care and the provision of patient-centred trauma services.

A Programme Steering Group for the Implementation of the Trauma System has been established to oversee the governance of implementation of the recommendations of the Trauma Strategy. This Group

is co-chaired by the HSE’s Chief Clinical Officer, Dr Colm Henry and the Chief Strategy Officer, Mr Dean Sullivan. The Group is also supported by active and engaged service user representatives.

Under the leadership and direction of the National Clinical Lead for Trauma Services, Mr Keith Synnott, the recommendations were grouped into eleven high-level workstreams. Mr Synnott also led the development of a high level roadmap for the multiannual implementation of the Trauma System which was approved by the Programme Steering Group in March 2021 and forms the basis of the work of the National Office for Trauma Services in the coming years.

Work is underway to progress the recommendations of the National Trauma Strategy and it is expected that the full implementation of the programme will take five to seven years.

In the past year, the rehabilitation workstream has developed a Rehabilitation Needs Assessment (RNA) and Rehabilitating Prescription (RP) that will be used across all services providing rehabilitation to trauma patients. The RNA and RP are designed to assess trauma patient’s rehabilitation needs and generate a personal prescription for rehabilitation that should accompany all patients as they transition through the trauma care pathway. The RNA and RP have been approved by the Programme Steering Group for implementation in the two Major Trauma Centres, MMUH and CUH as well as at the National Rehabilitation Hospital following an engagement process with key clinical and patient stakeholders in acute hospital and rehabilitation services.

The National Office for Trauma Services is engaging with stakeholders across the HSE, including HSE National Clinical Programmes and voluntary organisations to develop rehabilitation pathways for patients following traumatic injuries. This includes collaboration with the National Clinical Programme for Rehabilitation Medicine and Neurorehabilitation Implementation Strategy to support the establishment of Managed Clinical Rehabilitation Networks.

Trauma rehabilitation is a key component to the successful implementation of an inclusive Trauma System for Ireland. The National Office for Trauma Services will continue to develop and support the enhancement of rehabilitation services in line with the National Trauma Strategy recommendations with the aim of improving patient outcomes and experiences following traumatic injury.

THAILAND IN A POWER CHAIR

By Bernard Healy

Almost two years since travelling anywhere outside Ireland, I flew to Thailand in mid-January 2022. In that two year stay at home I had gotten myself a new power chair - A Quickie 500R (rear wheel drive).

So, the plan was to bring my powerchair all the way to Thailand. Not so easy. Past experience has taught me that, depending on airlines, there are always issues with weight and batteries when travelling. Dry cell batteries are the best as Lithium are problematic for airlines. I could have looked to rent at my destination but again experience has taught me that one may not get the chair that one is used to, or cost can be a factor. I think most people would want to bring their own chair. Upon arrival, I usually head for the airline check-in, who in turn contact OCS who provide mobility assistance. Alternatively you can go straight to their reception desk in either terminal. Emirates are pretty good when it comes to travelling with a power chair, but it is always a stressful time when checking it in. Discussions by staff and repeated questions regarding the battery always ensue. This time was no different but in the end I was on my way. With most airlines you can choose to stay in your power chair until the gate. At the gate in my case, I had to transfer to a skychair (very small onboard chair) with the help of OCS staff and then into my seat on the plane. Again, I find the likes of Emirates, Etihad and Turkish Airlines very helpful on board when I may need to use skychair to toilet on very long flights. Next stop was a transfer stop of three hours in Dubai. Accessability staff met me on board and I transferred to a wheelchair and was taken to the mobility assistance lounge. I usually don't request my power chair to be taken off at transfer airports as it is already stowed in a box which will be transferred to the next flight. Final stop was Phuket and arrival went well and the chair was in one piece.





*Patong Beach Resort
Hotel Phuket. note ramp
to left*

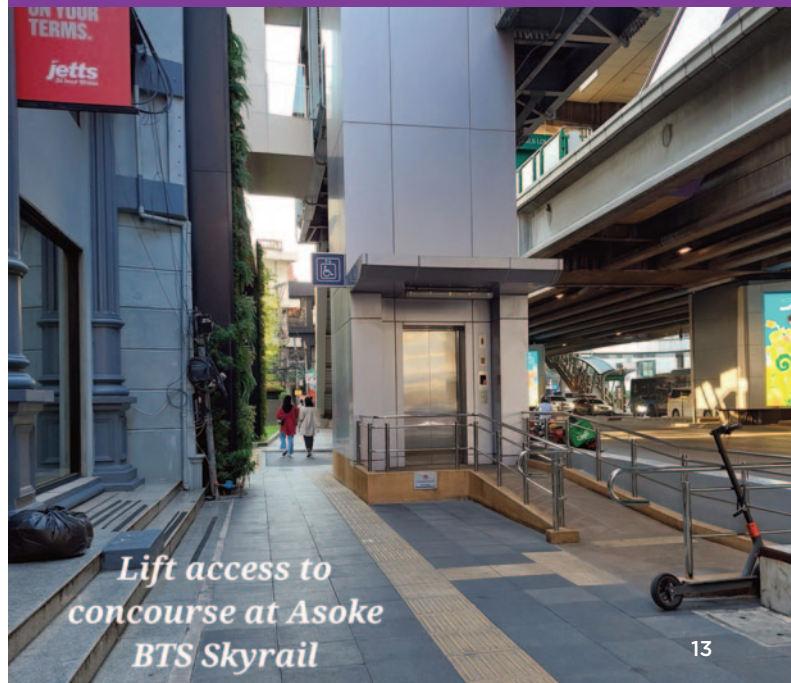
It is difficult to get from Phuket International airport to any of the beach resort destinations in a power chair. I have used what I think is the only operator of a minivan with a ramp on the Island. They also rent equipment, so I also booked the use of a commode(www.phuketaccesstravel.com). Because of the restrictions on my “Thailand Pass”(no longer needed), I had to stay in a specific hotel for one week, “Patong Resort” in Patong Beach. They have several wheelchair accessible rooms in their garden zone. There are a number of Western chain hotels which have accessible rooms and bathrooms (Ibis are very good). One has to be careful booking hotels and guesthouses when they say yes to that question, as “wheelchair accessible” means many things to people. I usually ask for a photo of bathroom with dimensions before booking. Access to taxis, kerbs, restaurants, bars and hotels can be challenging for power chair in Thailand, but this I find in many places and it is just a case of research and then looking around in one’s destination. There are accessible toilets in most shopping centres (and there are lots of them in Thailand) which are usually very good and clean. I was in Phuket for ten days, mostly spent relaxing on a practically empty beach in glorious heat. I wandered around Patong Beach observing what was open or closed and all the changes in the last two years.

One very noticeable thing was I had the place to myself. A trickle of tourists were present as the place reluctantly opened up to travellers.

I had booked a Thai Airways flight from Phuket to Bangkok where my wife and family were waiting for me. (My wife is Thai and travelled a month earlier to see her family). My flight was domestic and this is

where there can be a lot of hassle for a power chair user. Thai Air’s service is run by Thai Smile. I use this service because simply put, most low fare domestic airlines usually refuse a power user. Spend about 100 euro on return flight with Thai Smile, ring or email their special assistance about 72 hours before flight and have your wheelchair manual with you.

I had planned to use public transport to get from Bangkok Airport to the city centre, as it is difficult to get a taxi that will carry a power chair. There is a rail link that takes you into the city. All perfectly accessible. Depending on where you stay, you may have to change to the BTS skyrail system which again, is very accessible with many stops having elevators direct to street level. My hotel was an Ibis Styles on Lower Sukhumvit Road. This area is more or less where most travellers would stay for shopping, restaurants and nightlife. The place was the quietest



*Lift access to
concourse at Asoke
BTS Skyrail*



I'd ever seen Bangkok. No traffic either which was great as while there are many accessible pavements, you still need to use the road to avoid obstacles. I had the city to myself so I visited many places of interest using public transport. The skyrail service (BTS) links with a very impressive underground service (MRT) not forgetting the water taxi. There are also Blue colored buses which are accessible. www.wheelchairtours.com are based near Bangkok and offer a range of minivan trips, equipment for rent as well as personal care services. I was able to use their services on a trip to see my daughter's University just outside Bangkok. Wat Po and Chinatown are places I would recommend for easy access on the underground MRT. The famous Hualamphong Railway Station has some overnight sleeper services that provide wheelchair accessible

services. Though these are limited, an example would be a late evening journey to Chiang Mai.

I had a great five week holiday in Thailand and would highly recommend travelling there within the next year before the huge crowds are back. I was there during what is termed high season down the South (Nov-Apr) which is hot with no rain. Other times of the year can be quite pleasant and a little cheaper though but you will get rain. Bangkok can be hot and sticky but most places have aircon. Remember, it is a massive city. Other things to remember – sun, food and most of all the Thai people. While reserved and generally shy of foreigners, the local people are always willing to help anyone who needs it. They are genuinely surprised at the efforts mobility impaired people go to to visit the country.



*rooftop bar Ibis Styles Hotel
Sukhumvit Bangkok*

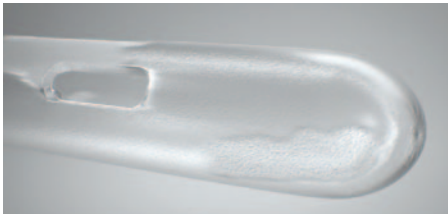


*Few people on Patong Beach
Phuket*

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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

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Stays smooth

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

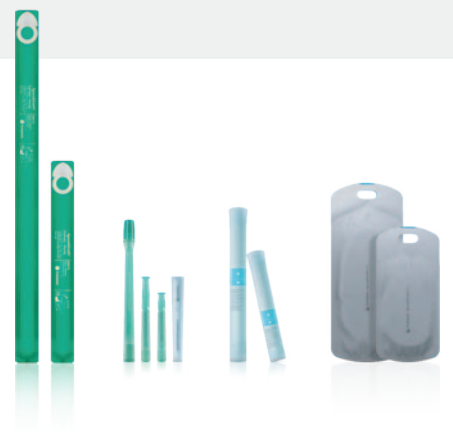


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The raffle raised a record breaking €26,000. There was also an auction on the day which was incredibly well supported and all together the event raised over €120,000, an amazing achievement. We're so grateful to absolutely everyone who came along and made it such a special event.

One of the highlights of our year to date has been the incredible feats of one man in particular, Lester Cassidy. Lester approached us and the NRH in 2019 with a fundraising idea. He wanted to climb Croagh Patrick. There was only one snag – he was going to do it in his wheelchair and get his friends and family to help push and pull him up! It was going to be a huge challenge for all involved, but this didn't phase Lester. He recruited his local hurling team to give him a hand with the push, he had a specially designed dune buggy fabricated to help him get over all the rocks and shale, and then he went on an incredible fundraising drive, raising over €125,000 and counting for the two charities. A phenomenal achievement in more ways than one. We can't thank Lester enough, and we're looking forward already to hearing him speak at our AGM.

We'd also like to say a big thank you to Niall Gunne for his significant support this year, as well as Vistra, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and the Iris O'Brien Foundation for their kind and generous support.

Our Tall Ships Adventure (see page 22) and our Algarve Cycle (see page 16) were both great successes and we have a good few fundraising events still to come with a BBQ on 10th September in the Royal St. George Yacht Club, our inaugural London Lunch in Queen's Club on 17th September, A Day In My Wheels, which will be in run in both Dublin and Cork this year and the Q Ball in November. Our Monthly Prize Draw also continues for the remainder of the year.

We are amazed by the support we have received over the first six months of the year and we are so grateful to everyone who has supported the spinal cord injury community over this time.

Our Monthly Prize Draw continues to be popular with our supporters, with over four hundred people taking part each month buying tickets to be in with a chance to win some great cash prizes. A big thanks to everyone who took part and congratulations to all the winners. We hope you enjoyed spending your winnings!

On Saturday, 2nd April, over 400 people gathered in the Intercontinental Hotel for Spinal Injuries Ireland's Spring Lunch. This annual event hadn't been held for two years due to Covid so it was fantastic to see so many supporters getting glammed up and attending this popular event organised by Philip Quinlan, who sustained a C6 complete injury in 1999 and is quadriplegic. Philip was MC on the day and introduced inspirational speaker Mark Pollock, who received a standing ovation after his address.

The event was kindly sponsored by the Institute of Education who, in addition to their sponsorship, donated a raffle prize of a voucher worth €1,000.





On Bank Holiday Monday, 2nd of May, 16 people from all over Ireland gathered in Dublin airport to travel to the Algarve. Most hadn't met before but straight away everyone clicked; whether an experienced cyclist looking to do 100Kms a day, or a leisure cyclist keen on shorter routes at a slower pace, we were all heading off on the same adventure – the inaugural Spinal Injuries Ireland Algarve Accessible Cycle, in partnership with the IRFU Charitable Trust.

When the plane touched down, we could feel the heat of the Portuguese afternoon sun, a pleasant contrast from the wet and windy conditions we had left behind. Destination: the Wyndham Grand in Quinta do Lago; a gorgeous, spacious, accessible hotel which would be our base for the week. We were met at the hotel by double gold medal-winning Paralympian, Mark Rohan, who was to be our guide on the cycles. He took us out for a leisurely ride around Quinta that afternoon so we could get our bearings and to make sure we were all comfortable with the bikes. There was time enough for a quick dip or drink by the pool afterwards before a lovely dinner in the hotel restaurant that night.

The next morning, after a big buffet breakfast, we were back in the saddle. Mark and his team briefed us on the various safety aspects of riding in a group, as well as some particular considerations for any hand cyclists, and off we went.



Enormous buffet breakfast in the hotel (to make sure we had enough carbs on board, and because the food was delicious!)

A morning cycling along the back roads and hidden paths of the hills surrounding Quinta do Lago, taking in the sights and having the chats. The weather was spectacular all week long and the views well worth the effort.

We would stop each day for a coffee in some quiet little village – Quarteria, Faro, Boliqueime – rest our legs and soak up the Algarve atmosphere, before setting off again for home.

The afternoons we mainly had to ourselves, free to either explore Quinta, lounge by the pool, use the spa or hit the beach. The afternoons were pretty relaxed!

Dinner was served either in the hotel or we would go out to one of the local restaurants. Steak, seafood, cheese, wine, pasteles de nata for dessert – there was no shortage of deliciousness on offer.



One of the highlights, beyond the views and camaraderie of the cycling, was our visit to a local winery on the Wednesday afternoon. We were brought on a tour of the vineyard before being seated at tables outside where we had a stunning view of the Valley of Tor and were served a selection of wines and complementary tapas. The perfect way to spend an afternoon and well earned after all the cycling.

We want to say a huge thank you to everyone who took part and made the trip such a great success. Not only did the cycle help raise over €50,000 for people with spinal cord injuries, but some lifelong friendships were made. We're looking forward to next year already.



Our RIB, the Niamh, was in storage for two years so needed a lot of love and attention to get her back to a voyage ready state and we are delighted to say that we have done that now with the help and support of many people, particularly Philip Scallan who has done a remarkable job storing, maintaining and transporting her around the country. As you will see from the Inclusion Games photos she is looking super and is ready to provide a lot of fun on the water.

Our bus, was also off the road for over two years and is in need of some TLC to restore her so that we can help with the transport of you and your family members to enjoy these activities when required. This work is currently in progress.

Here at SII we are firm believers in the benefits of being out on the water and the escape and sense of wellbeing that it can provide. In the words of Mark Twain,

Our RIB is based in Dun Laoghaire Marina and waiting to take out our service users and their families. What could be more exhilarating than heading out the harbour mouth with the wind in your hair, up the Liffey or around Dalkey Island, with a few of your family members or a couple of close friends? Round the day up with delicious fish and chips from the pier which are always so much better when eaten at sea.

We realise that Dun Laoghaire is not exactly handy for many of our service users but it is fantastic to know that there are now accessible boats throughout the country so there is no shortage of opportunity for people with a spinal cord injury to spend a little time out on the water.

We do acknowledge that heading out on the water is not for everyone so with that in mind we are and will be offering alternatives for our service users.

Nothing beats that rush of excitement and anticipation as your favourite team enters the pitch to the mighty roar of the crowd for that crucial clash that everyone wants to be part of. Or would you rather experience the rush of live music as your favourite band rock the stadium? Don't let your spinal injury hold you back. We have already organised tickets to many major sporting clashes and concerts for some service users and family members in 2022.

We will organise a fun family excursion for you and your loved ones to spend a fabulous day out, creating wonderful memories. Let us know where you would like to visit and leave it with us to organise. (examples: Fota Wildlife Park, Dublin Zoo, Tayto Park, Dublin Horse Show).

So, bear with us and we will be contacting you to see if there is an activity that appeals to you and will organise everything for you.



The weather on the Saturday meant that the number of watersports available to participants was limited but thankfully our RIB, the Niamh, was operational for the entire weekend and proved a popular choice for many of the participants and families that attended.

Our crack team of volunteers, Eugene Power, Sue McGrath and Philip Scallan, brought a wealth of experience, enthusiasm and good humour and we are so grateful to them for giving up their time to take part in this hugely important event. We met some fantastic families and individuals and it was very rewarding to see what joy some time spent having fun on the water brought to everyone.

Irish Sailing pulled together a fantastic group of 71 volunteers who ensured that a great time was had by all and the inclement weather, which wasn't nearly as bad as was forecast, failed in its attempt to dampen spirits. Everyone went home happy, fulfilled and exhausted. We look forward to reconnecting with everyone and welcoming new participants in Wexford next year.

Congratulations to Johanne Murphy and Ciaran Murphy and the team at Irish Sailing for pulling off a hugely successful and enjoyable event for all.



In the furthest reaches of Donegal, in the Inishowen Peninsula, on the Wild Atlantic Way, lies the Welcome House. Situated in the pretty village of Culdaff and close to a magnificent beach, the detached house is very well adapted. Finished to a very high standard with high contrast decoration defining doors and hallways to assist anyone with sight impairment, it has four bedrooms which can accommodate up to 12 people. There is a large master bedroom with an ensuite bathroom; a twin bedroom; a dormitory style room - ideal for children - with three sets of bunk beds; and a bedroom fitted out with a hospital bed, electric blind, a day-bed and ensuite bathroom/wet-room with plenty of turning space. The living area consists of a large kitchen-dining room and an enormous sitting room with wood-burning stove and French doors to the back garden. It's a comfortable room in which to read, watch a match or movie - the TV has a good satellite connection - or to browse on the house wi-fi. The house is surrounded by large lawns and lots of parking space. Wheelchair users will be glad to know: there is no gravel!

Wooden floors make pushing the wheelchair easy and there are no awkward saddles on the doors. The corridors are extra-wide with double doors into the living areas. A built-in ramp from the French doors leads to a terrace and the back garden. The kitchen is a beautiful bright room with double doors to the front of the house, a fireplace and sofa-corner as well as space around the table for a party of at least a dozen people. Differential colouring in the kitchen makes the working area very navigable along with touch buttons on the appliances. The room is big so that a wheelchair can go right round the table very easily. The dining table is high enough that wheelchair handles can slide in underneath comfortably.

Culdaff is a lively village with a well-stocked shop, a couple of pubs, a coffee shop and a charming small hotel. The hotel, McGrory's, is well known for its convivial atmosphere, live music and award-winning food. The village has been catering for tourists for generations. A big attraction is its magnificent blue-flag beach. Equally attractive and always welcome is a post swim coffee served up from a mobile barista service perched above the sand-dunes.

The Inishowen Peninsula is famous for the rugged beauty of the mountains and cliffs and numerous sandy beaches. A short drive away is Malin Head – the most northerly point of this island. There you can view the old Éire markings from World War II, the deserted island of Inishtrahull, and the wild beauty that was featured in the Star Wars movie. The area is rich in archaeological and historical sites from high crosses to the ancient hill-top stronghold of Niall of the Nine Hostages. Along the way are many interesting options for coffee stops, lunch or dinner.



I've been there several times with family and friends. I've always been amazed how the Inishowen Peninsula throws up something new to explore even when you think you know it backwards. The Welcome House is easy to live in and generates a party atmosphere. Even though it has the feel of being miles from anywhere in the hills of Donegal, there is the reassurance that Carndonagh, with good GP and pharmacy, is only a few miles away and Derry and Letterkenny hospitals within reach just in case. Sinéad is such an accommodating, efficient and sympathetic hostess that everything - booking, house-keeping etc is made easy. We've had great fun every time. And intend to again!

Contact Sinead directly on 0872644810 or sineadehanly@gmail.com

You may have seen recently in the media, and elsewhere a number of stories related to studies using electrical stimulation or “neuromodulation” as a potential treatment for spinal cord injury. We look at some of the key questions, and potential opportunities arising from this type of therapy for paralysis.

Neuromodulation describes targeted, programmed stimulation in areas of the body that modulate the activity of nerves. Recent studies have focused on delivering electrical stimulation to different parts of the spinal cord, in conjunction with a tailored physical rehabilitation regime.

A spinal cord injury disrupts the normal communication pathways between the brain and the cord, with “functions” like movement and sensation affected below the site of the injury.

Neuromodulation boosts nerve signals to “awaken” dormant pathways which may still be intact, in order to restore or improve these functions.

Currently there are two methods in which the electrical stimulator is delivered. This can be done using an implantable device, with a special membrane placed onto the spinal cord itself via a minimal invasive surgical procedure.

Electrical stimulation can also be delivered externally through electrodes which are placed on the skin near the area of the spinal cord responsible for delivering a specific movement or function. For example to target restoration in hand and arm function these electrodes are placed on the neck. The stimulation is “turned on” using an external or handheld device.

Early-stage clinical trials and pilots have demonstrated a variety of outcomes ranging from improved movement and sensation to improvements to bladder and autonomic functions including blood pressure regulation.

There is also growing evidence to support that some measure of functional improvement is retained once the stimulation is removed or “switched off”.

We have a number of related spinal stimulation research studies in our research portfolio that starting or well underway in the UK, and abroad. We look forward to being able to share the results of these clinical pilots as these studies complete.

Additionally, we are partnering with ONWARD Medical who are playing a leading role in developing this technology. They are currently running an FDA-pivotal clinical trial with this externally delivered spinal stimulation technology with the objective of making it available in clinics as soon as possible.

Our next focus will be to continue to refine and improve the use of these technologies whilst bringing together industry, healthcare partners and regulators to prepare the clinical landscape for making this type of therapeutic available to the wider SCI community.

This technology, we are also working with healthcare providers and regulators to prepare the clinical landscape for this type of therapeutic.

Accelerating delivery of these kind of life changing therapies will take effort, coordination and - critically - funding.

You can find more about this area of study through the research section of our website [www.spinal-research.org](#), as well as

Spinal Research is the UK’s leading charity funding medical research to develop life changing treatments for paralysis caused by spinal cord injury. You can find out more about their work through their website (spinal-research.org) or through their social channels:

We were absolutely delighted with how our Tall Ships Adventure went for 2022.

Twenty-six brave souls (including 9 people with a spinal cord injury) signed up to take on the challenge of sailing the SV Tenacious, the only accessible tall ship in the world, from Poole in England, along the south coast to Land's End and then up to Dublin. It was an incredible experience for all on board, able-bodied and disabled alike. We packed so much in, had a phenomenal experience and everyone got on brilliantly. You could say we had a, ahem, "whale" of a time. This is what we got up to...

Day one was predominantly travel. OCS did a brilliant job escorting us all through an incredibly busy Dublin airport with plenty of time to spare before a short hop across to Bournemouth, where we were met by a fleet of accessible minivans to take us to the bustling harbour town of Poole. We were welcomed aboard by the First Mate Ben, split into four watches (teams) and introduced to our watch leaders straight away. They told us where to find our bunks as well as giving us our timetables for the week. Each watch would take turns in doing four hour shifts throughout the voyage. This meant we could be working day or night (midnight to 4am or 4am to 8am shifts), everyone had to do their bit and take their turn. We finished the day with a delicious three course meal and a few drinks to help us find our sea legs!

Up and at 'em at 07.30. A ship-wide announcement woke us all (those who weren't already on watch or coming onto watch) and invited us for a cooked breakfast. We were then shown the ropes, literally (over 22Kms of rope on the ship apparently), how to haul and flake and generally keep the place ship-shape, before breaking for smoko (elevenes) of tea and freshly baked biscuits. After smoko we were instructed on how to go aloft safely to the crow's nest (in a harness, clipped in). As we only had a short window before lunch (another delicious two-course meal – we ate so well, and so much, throughout the whole voyage!) it was decided only able-bodied people would go aloft on this day and those with an injury the following day as that required more time. It was a tricky climb but manageable and worth it in the end. The views were spectacular.

Somebody has to do the washing up! Everyone took it in turn to do mess duty, with one person nominated from each watch, so four people assisting Chef Mica and his friendly assistant Karen. There were over forty people on board in total so no shortage of jobs. Set the table, serve the food, clear the table, wash up. Rinse and repeat.



Three servings for each meal (the permanent crew ate separately, as did those on watch and mess duty), and three meals a day. That's a lot of washing up! Outside though, everyone's starting to feel at home. Some people have gone out on the bow sprits to relax on the nets; they caught our first sighting of dolphins as they danced in and out directly beneath them. An amazing sight. Others are on watch, looking out for ships both through binoculars and on the ship's radar, or at the helm, steering the ship as one of the permanent crew give instructions. The crew were great at educating us along the journey so we all felt like old salty dogs by the end of the trip.

We also got our first introduction to "happy hour", which isn't as fun as it sounds. Swabbing the decks and scrubbing everywhere down to make sure the ship is in pristine condition. We were a proper working crew.

This was the highlight of the trip, no doubt about it. There were three options for people with SCIs to get up to the crow's nest: be hoisted up in a sling, hoist yourself up using a self-propelled winch, or be supported by a permanent crew member to climb the rigging. It depended on people's injuries as to which option they went for, but regardless of which they opted for, there was an incredible amount of courage and determination on display. It was humbling to be present. An incredible and unforgettable experience.

We also had some more hard work to do, bracing the yardarms. These are the horizontal spars mounted on the masts that hold the sails and they are seriously heavy so all hands on deck as we worked as a team to '2-6 heave' these into place, ready to unfurl when we reached the Channel in the morning.

We anchored off Penzance that night (feeling like pirates), where lots of local sailors came out to say hello and to admire the ship.

Eight brave people went up the mast, out on the yardarms and unfurled the sails, and then we were off. Slightly slower than under engines (there hadn't been enough wind for the first few days) but more peaceful and authentic. Catching the wind in the enormous sails was definitely another highlight.

A whale sauntered past as we approached Ireland and there was no shortage of dolphins. People were also sneaking off for well-earned naps now at this stage. Tired but happy out.

As we approached Dublin, the weather changed. We broke out our yellow oil skins and got the genuine sailing experience around Ireland as the rain lashed down. It didn't dampen the spirits though as we made good headway, eventually anchoring just by the Forty Foot in Scotman's Bay.

We had a final farewell meal onboard; the guitar was cracked out and the singsongs went long into the night.

Mixed emotions as we sailed into Dublin. Everyone had worked hard to get us there, we were tired and delighted to have made it but at the same time sorry to be leaving each other. We'd grown close over the week on board, bonded over hauling ropes and singing songs, but all good things...





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