

## **From finding my feet to finding solutions: reflections on the impact of attending the PMG conference**

As a newly qualified physiotherapist, I was awarded a bursary by PMG to attend the 2015 conference in Leeds. I work for a charity at a residential nursing home in the Lake District where adult residents present with a variety of complex neurological conditions, and use wheelchairs. I oversee all the seating and postural management needs of the residents, and work closely with the local wheelchair services. I was interested in attending the PMG conference to improve my working knowledge of posture and seating, gain a deeper understanding of the rationale behind seating choices, and to meet other professionals working in the field.

At the outset of the conference I felt like a fish out of water, and I was a little overwhelmed by the huge array of equipment being showcased by the exhibitors. I was initially concerned that I would struggle to find relevance to my small pocket of work in the Lake District. However, by lunchtime on the first day, after listening to several fantastic speakers, I began to pick up nuggets of knowledge that I could take back with me to benefit my clients. I attended the parallel session led by Jane Fontaine, "Manipulating weight-maximising efficiency", and learnt how to ensure a wheelchair is set up to maximise efficiency. One of my clients with acquired brain injury has weak upper limbs and struggles to self-propel any worthwhile distance. By changing the position of her wheels in relation to her trunk, we have made it possible for her to travel from the dining room to the communal living area, a huge achievement for her, giving her some independence and choice about where she wants to be and when she wants to be there.

After several trips round the PMG exhibition I honed my browsing skills and found suppliers of the equipment we use at our nursing home and was able to ask lots of questions about how to get the most out of their products. I had a particularly fruitful discussion with the providers of Roho cushions, and have managed to improve the hip alignment of one patient as a result of troubleshooting the problems I faced – an invaluable experience.

Through conversations with a range of professionals, I could feel myself developing as a practitioner as my knowledge base broadened. I have always taken a holistic view of my patients, and attending the conference enabled me to deepen my understanding, so that I could better meet the seating needs of clients, considering intricacies that had not even occurred to me before.

Another positive effect from attending the conference was noticing how my confidence increased, not just learning new things, but by confirming the quality and rationale behind my current practices. I work independently as a newly qualified physiotherapist and I find receiving any kind of professional feedback extremely beneficial.

Several sessions served as inspiration, such as the "Unseatables" presentation by Cate James and Pete Rowell. It made me realise that, through productive discussions and team work, solutions can be found in the most complex of circumstances. The session on the use of the PURPOSE-T tool for assessing pressure risk informed me of a potentially more suitable tool for our service than the Waterlow score we currently use. The PURPOSE-T tool is much more user friendly and the layout of the pressure ulcer prevention pathways (PUPPs) provides a clearly defined framework to work to, which would help ensure continuity across the service. In conjunction with the nursing staff we will be considering switching to this tool in

the future – a direct result of my attending the conference. I have also discussed the tool with the local tissue viability team who had not come across it before either, and may now consider its use for different services.

Overall I feel that by attending the PMG conference I am much more confident at addressing the seating needs of my residents. I have introduced a weekly posture & positioning training session at the home, where I have been able to incorporate the knowledge I gained - I find it a wonderful way to disseminate information directly to the care staff. As a result we have improved the 24 hour postural management of the patients in our care.

Although the client group I work with is one in steady physical decline, I know that by positioning people well, in appropriate seating, I can maximise their function, activity and participation, and I can safely say that attending the PMG conference has helped me improve the quality of life of the residents I care for. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank PMG for providing me with the bursary.

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