

PMG's Impact on Malta

Having graduated as a physiotherapist in 2012, I was eager to start my career at Malta's geriatric hospital the following year, enthusiastic to give my utmost to my patients and to the service in general. Malta has an ageing population; therefore, apart from the increase in the number of people affected by neurological disability, there is an increase in disability due to the effects of ageing. This has implications for healthcare professionals, with more expertise in managing these problems now needed. A significant number of the residents at the geriatric hospital are non-ambulant, thus the need for proper posture management is even greater in order to prevent or manage secondary problems such as postural asymmetry or tissue damage.

In no time I started getting referrals from the wards for seating assessments, mostly for patients confined to sitting in a chair. It was not hard to notice a pattern that was consistent among the patients – most were referred for 'sliding out of the chair' or 'developed a sore in sitting'. The options available for posture management on the wards were scarce, and I soon realised the need to find what was available on the market regarding the best seating solutions to improve a patient's quality of life and also the carer's ease of care.

During my studies at university, I was exposed to the basics of seating. However, as my job required me to carry out seating assessments and prescribe seating systems, I soon realised that I needed a good sound knowledge of the subject. I needed to learn more about this field to be able to prescribe the most appropriate equipment for the patient, choosing from the vast number of products available, both off-the-shelf and custom made. At times, seating systems were being prescribed without proper assessment or without proper background reading about the subject. This meant that products were being bought or used, but not being effective in any way.

It was then that I realised the importance of good seating and thus a good solid knowledge on the subject was required. I was interested to learn about this field and to help fill the gap in posture awareness in Malta. This led me to do the course in posture management at Nuffield's Orthopaedic Centre in Oxford, where I learnt about the dynamic relationship between posture, function and the environment, and how these affect the patient and the ideal seating system. It was here that I learned about PMG and the annual conference, and was interested in attending. I was determined to represent my country as best I could and gain as much knowledge as possible.

The conference has helped me more than I expected. It exposed me to many seating systems that were not being considered in Malta when prescribing for our patients. I became more knowledgeable and able to critically evaluate equipment being offered.

It was very interesting to meet other healthcare professionals and specialists in the field and learn about their process of assessment and management of posture in their respective clinics in other countries. I learnt how I could improve the service provision in Malta, and was eager to go back home and share this knowledge with my colleagues.

We are very proud of our recently inaugurated Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre, where patients throughout Malta and Gozo can be seen for a seating assessment when required. The PMG conference provided a great opportunity to meet companies at the exhibition and acquire information about new technologies in cushions, wheelchairs and seating accessories. Following the conference we have had meetings with some of these companies and have invited them to present their respective products. We are pleased to say that we now have good contacts and are aware of a wider selection of products to choose from.

I am extremely grateful to PMG for offering me the bursary which made it financially easier for me to attend. A most gratifying experience! Thank you!

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