* A reflection on the impact of attending the PMG conference

I have been a wheelchair user for over 20 years and recently started my own business teaching manual wheelchair skills after noticing a high need for this service, particularly among adults with degenerative conditions. I have found that many people value learning the vital skills to overcome everyday environmental challenges from someone who themselves is dependent on a wheelchair for everyday mobility. As a new business I have been keen to expand my knowledge in this field to ensure I continue to offer a quality service to my clients.

In the early years after sustaining my Spinal Cord Injury I didn’t realise the importance of looking after yourself, resulting in poor health and bad posture. Unfortunately I learnt the hard way. I was grateful to attend this year’s Posture and Mobility conference, and found it reassuring to know services are focusing on the importance of maintaining good posture and using the best mobility products to enable comfort, independence and good quality of life. It was exciting to witness the research, new developments and products available to aid quality of life for people with disabilities.

On arriving at the venue and witnessing the scale of the ICC, it was very helpful to be welcomed by the well-presented security staff on hand to direct and support visitors. In the Exhibition Hall my stand was clearly visible and I was confident visitors would be able to find my business, Freedom Wheelchair Skills. Interest in Freedom Wheelchair Skills was continuous during the course of the conference. Professionals working in different areas came to discuss client needs and the potential to develop skills. It was positive that visitors to the conference were able to learn about the wheelchair skills that can be taught, which can result in the client becoming less dependent on others and safer in using their wheelchair, and to take away flyers for Freedom Wheelchair Skills.

The welcome drinks held at Marmalade were a good opportunity to chat and get to know other exhibitors. This extended the chance to further the Speed Networking connections already made. The Gala Dinner also offered more opportunity to network in a relaxed environment, getting to know peers in the same field. It was good to hear about what other services and business are offering and I hope people benefited from hearing about Freedom Wheelchair Skills.

I valued the lecture by Tom Paulson on *the Propulsive Shoulder Forces and Scapular Kinematics during Manual Wheelchair use*. I now have a better understanding of the impact of incorrect pushing techniques on upper limb function and pain. As a result I emphasise to my clients the importance of maintaining the correct technique when propelling their wheelchair, providing clear reasons why this is essential. I was also interested in the workshop *What can developments in the WHO Wheelchair Service Training Packages and the International Society of Wheelchair Professionals bring to the UK*. It was interesting to hear about Motivation, who facilitated the session, and the work they do abroad. After hearing about the training package we were encouraged to discuss this in small groups. One major impact for me was the confirmation of the importance of having the right chair to suit individuals needs and I was excited by the potential of working more collaboratively with Wheelchair Services.

From attending this year’s conference, I have been able to increase my network of contacts and become more aware of the needs of people who have mobility and posture issues due to a disability. I hope that the new links made will allow more people to access the skills on offer from Freedom Wheelchair Skills. This will increase people’s independence and confidence and quite possibly reduce the need for further physio or readmitting people to hospital due to further pain or complications in their condition. The Posture and Mobility Conference has highlighted the importance of good wheelchair skills practice for everyone.