

## **Posture and pressure management: social psychological explanations for compliance with use of clinically prescribed seating functions**

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### **Summary**

Research has demonstrated that wheelchair users often fail to comply with clinical recommendations about using their functions (e.g. Ding et al., 2008). This is a multidisciplinary research project which investigates the reasons people give for complying with their clinically prescribed seating functions from a social psychological perspective.

### **Aims & Objectives**

The aim of this study is to identify the reasons powered wheelchair users give to explain their level of compliance with clinically prescribed seating functions. The study also aims to explain how participants' knowledge and attitudes, as well as the beliefs of relevant others, affect compliance. This work will lay the foundations for further research aimed at developing an intervention to increase positive healthcare behaviours for people in wheelchairs.

### **Background**

This is a collaborative, multidisciplinary research project between the South Wales Posture and Mobility Service and the School of Psychology at the University of South Wales, funded by the Posture and Mobility Group. Data collection is still in the early stages as the project only began in November 2016. Our intention is to present a preliminary summary of our findings at the PMG conference in 2017 and then give a full and comprehensive presentation in 2018.

Over the last twenty years, the provision of powered mobility equipment with seating functions (tilt-in-space, recline, elevating leg supports) specifically prescribed to align postures, prevent contractures and reduce the risk of pressure ulcers, has risen. However, recent research has shown that many powered wheelchair users do not comply with clinical recommendations about using these features to manage posture or pressure (Lacoste et al, 2003; Ding et al, 2008). There has been little evidence obtained to understand non-compliance, with key studies calling for further research on this (Sonnenblum et al, 2009; Schofield et al, 2013). This research aims to extend our understanding of the underlying reasons for non-compliance, with the intention of developing an intervention to improve the rates of compliance.

Recent research in social psychology has highlighted the important role group-based identities have in improving the healthcare outcomes for people in different settings (Haslam, 2014). This improves the predictive power of traditional models of health behaviour (Theory of Planned Behaviour; Ajzen, 1991; the Health Belief Model, Conner & Norman, 1996). Greenaway et al. (2015) has shown that group identification leads to a stronger sense of control, and adherence to positive health behaviours. Further, the health-enhancing role of social identities is often both independent from, and stronger than, the specific features of a particular therapeutic technique (Haslam, 2014).

This research is qualitative in nature, and focuses on the opinions and experience of participants with regards their powered wheelchairs, and the degree to which people engage with their seating functions. Semi-structured interviews are being employed, and specifically focus on potential barriers to engagement with reference to participants' knowledge of, and attitudes towards, the

functions and their benefits, as well as the social norms that exist in relation to the use of the features.

A thematic analysis, following the procedure recommended by Braun & Clarke (2006), will be carried out. To ensure reliability, transcripts will be analysed independently, then a process of discussion will be embedded to ensure researcher triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This will be a theory driven analysis, and the key research aims will be taken into consideration when performing it. Specific focus will be placed on identifying attitudes, self-reported behaviour, and experiences of being a wheelchair user, and these will be linked to models of behaviour change and social identity.

## **Discussion**

This study will seek to integrate knowledge and experience from different disciplines, enhance clinical expertise when prescribing specific powered wheelchairs, and promote a more holistic and client-centred practice for meeting the postural and mobility needs of people with physical disabilities. It is hoped that this work will lay the foundations for further research, which will develop an intervention, based on social psychological principles, to increase positive healthcare behaviours for people in wheelchairs. In addition to this, the data collected from this project could enable clearer prescription guidelines within the wheelchair service, leading to more cost-effective provision.

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