PMG – An eye opening experience

I am a PhD student at the University of Chester studying the medical applications of Augmented Reality, the same technology that is used in Pokémon GO. Previously, I studied Computer Science at Bangor University in North Wales where I also did an internship as a researcher looking at Virtual Environments and Haptics in medical applications. During this time, I worked with NISCHR (National Institute of Social and Health Care Research) in North Wales and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board as part of the internship.

Attending the Posture and Mobility Group Conference this year has opened my eyes to a world I never thought I would be involved in. Posture support, assistive devices and seat pressure regulation are all foreign concepts to me. These areas and more have exposed me to the different and varied research topics. It was fascinating to learn about the shoulder forces that are exerted when pushing a manual wheelchair and the best technique for using a manual wheelchair, how there is an ongoing battle against pressure ulcers and how PUPIS is working around the country to combat this issue.

One thing that helped me enjoy this conference was the friends that I had made during the event. From meeting new people and discussing projects at the opening Caribbean night, helping the camera crew during the conference, to the gala dinner and after-party. It was a fun to talk to others about their experiences in their own field.

Even though this area is new to me, there was still some presentations that felt a little closer to home. The talk, given by Samuel Esson, about how 3D printing can be used to prototype parts for assistive technologies, e.g. specialized mounts or control panels, was of particular interest as I have had previous experience using a 3D printer and was interested in its applications in other, more varied, areas.

The exhibition was also a good opportunity to take a look at some of the companies and charities involved in the posture and mobility area. It was interesting to see the new and emerging technologies that were on show at the exhibition. For example, Genny Mobility UK was showcasing their Segway wheelchair, the only Segway vehicle official licensed so it can be driven on UK roads, and the work of Consolor LTD on using 3D visualization with other technologies to model and design bespoke seating solutions.

This was also my first conference as a PhD student, as well as my first paper presentation, so it was a good experience of how they work, the general scheduling of the event and the activities that is put on as part of the proceedings. Seeing the conference stage for the first time was exciting and daunting at the same time as it was a large stage with a much larger seating area. Nerves were definitely not helped by the knowledge of being recorded for a webcast.

As my PhD progresses and the projects that I am involved in continue to develop, I look forward to seeing some of the future developments and advancements that come from both my own field and the different areas of posture and mobility. I also wish everyone from the conference and the friends I made all the best in their future pursuits!