The first thing that struck me as a first time attendee at the PMG conference 2017 was the diversity of topics covered. Medical, technological, personal and service level issues were all debated and discussed, but ultimately, the main theme that ran through all of them was maintaining a person centred approach. I learned that one of the greatest skills a wheelchair clinician can have is to achieve the balance between a person’s goals and functional aims, their postural, mobility needs, and the equipment that can best achieve these.

The conference displayed technological innovation in the exhibition hall and in several of the lectures and once again the predominant message appears to be about the balance between posture and participation. I was introduced to technology that is being developed to monitor temperatures, postures, pressure care and client usage to maintain the equilibrium between service user and equipment to maximise function and minimise deformity and discomfort. Technology is also being developed to encourage service users to take responsibility for managing some of their own posture, seating and mobility needs which compliments the introduction of personal budgets. I will take this new awareness of developing technologies back to my workplace and will consider it when assessing clients. I will also consider how I can empower clients in this way.

It was inspiring to hear in the Aldersea lecture that although change is inevitable, in this field, the issues that wheelchair users want to overcome remain the focus for clinicians. Even as wheelchairs and seating systems become increasingly advanced the postural principles underpinning them remain the same and the ultimate goal is always individual client satisfaction. The many debates between clinicians that I observed at the conference led me to believe there is often more than one answer when considering the “best fit” within specialist seating and many of the case studies discussed highlighted the evolutionary nature of achieving and maintaining the balance between posture, individual function and comfort.

It was interesting to hear different professionals advocating for the collaboration between the technological innovators and researchers, medical professionals and therapists to achieve the greatest client outcomes. It was exciting to view and learn about new products available and to consider the clinical reasoning I might consider to advocate for these products for my clients. I learned that quite often those with technical knowledge of the products are able to make small adjustments to equipment to make it work for an individual client need. As Pauline Pope (2007) states “A disabled person may adopt a certain posture to optimise function” and therefore equipment may need to be adapted to accommodate this.

It was inspiring to hear a long-standing wheelchair user talking about his own experiences and his message again seemed to echo that person-centred provision is of upmost importance. He was clear that he knows what he would like to gain from his wheelchair. It must fit into his active lifestyle, but also, although his wheelchair is key in providing mobility, it is always secondary to the activity it allows him to participate in. “It is generally not acceptable to sacrifice function for normal postural alignment” (Pope 2007). As an Occupational Therapist this is a particular focus I would like to maintain in my future career.

Posture and mobility are always of high importance and can limit function, when impaired, but an individual’s functional goals and participation should not be compromised, wherever possible, in pursuit of optimising posture. However, I also learned about the importance of 24-hour postural management and the impact that deformation can have on seating ability, pressure ulcer risk and function. I will have greater awareness in my ongoing practice of the negative effects of gravity on posture and how to minimise the effects of this.

I have a renewed enthusiasm for achieving the best outcomes for my clients since attending the PMG conference and I hope the new knowledge I gained will enable me to have a more person centred approach.

References:

Pope, P., 2007. Severe and Complex Neurological Disability. London: Butterworth- Heinemann Elsevier

Referenced sessions:

**PL1.1**: *A struggle?...I think not!* Chris Rattenbury, Wheelpower ambassador

**PS3:** *A person-centred approach to the protection and restoration of body shape.* Tessa Ellis and Helena Poulton

**THE ALDERSEA LECTURE:** *Change: good, bad, or ugly?* Lone Rose, National Spinal Injuries Centre, Stoke Mandeville

**PL4: Personal Wheelchair Budgets (PWBs)**

1. *Personal wheelchair budgets update.* Kate Buffery, Senior Programme Manager Personalisation Wheelchair Services, NHS England
2. *PWBs in action – the pilot stage.* Frances Beavis, Clinical team leader/operational manager, Gloucestershire Wheelchair Service
3. *Question Time Panel* chaired by Dr Linda Marks

Frances Beavis

Kate Buffery

Debbie Gray, Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group

Krys Jarvis, Chair of National Wheelchair Managers’ Forum

Dr Jean Waters, Chair of PWB National Steering Group