PMG Bursar Report 2016 by Laura O’Halloran

I first came across the Posture and Mobility Group (PMG) when I came to post as the outpatient occupational therapist for the Queen Elizabeth National Spinal Injuries Unit in Glasgow Scotland. I found an old journal sitting on my desk, left by my predecessor and when I looked up this organisation online I was pleased to find that membership was now free and that journals were now being made available online. I quickly joined up and in a short time I have already reaped the benefits from joining this organisation. My predecessor had 20 plus years of seating experience so I still feel like a relative newbie to the world of seating assessment and spinal cord injury. Joining PMG has given me the opportunity for training in seating assessment, networking and keeping myself up to date on current research and best practice and awareness of the wide range of products on the market. I was very fortunate to have benefited from the PMG bursary to attend the PMG conference 2016.

As part of my role I work with long term wheelchair users who require ongoing assessment and review of seating, posture and pressure issues. My client group are vulnerable to pressure sores due to reduced mobility and sensation. I am required to review their sitting posture as well as pressure mapping and provision of pressure cushions to maintain and manage posture and skin integrity. My post requires a lot of problem solving and thinking on my feet.

The event started with the ever inspiring and positive Ade Adepitan, (Paralympian and Patron of Go Kids Go) sharing his journey with us. What better way to start the conference than with his inspiring story and what better reminder of why we do what we do, to provide seating systems so that people can go on to thrive and fulfil their potential.

There was such a wide array of parallel sessions that I must admit it was hard to choose which one to go to first. As the largest part of my role as a spinal outpatient occupational therapist is pressure ulcer prevention I decided to focus on this during the conference. I attended the European Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel (EPUAP) presentations first. The seminar by Peter Worsley (Bioengineer from the University of Southampton) on ‘A bioengineering approach to the early detection of pressure ulcers’ was particularly informative and I have gained a deeper understanding of the physiological factors and forces related to pressure ulcer development. I have already used some of this information in an education session with physiotherapy and occupational therapy colleagues within the spinal unit.

Another bit of research I found interesting was ‘Evaluation of custom-made seat cushions: pressure relief characteristics’ by Jennifer Bramley (Rehabilitation Unit, Swansea) regarding the efficacy of sacral cut outs. This is something that I have not prescribed myself but I often find that patients who have had their injury longer tend to come to me looking for a replacement bespoke cushion and request to keep the sacral cut out. It is interesting to see that the evidence shows that using a lighter foam has a better outcome than using a sacral cut out and therefore I plan to review this using our own pressure mapping system.

Working in spinal injuries, I was particularly interested in ‘A paralysed system?’ report produced by the Spinal Injuries Association and All Parliamentary Group on Spinal Cord Injury. Unfortunately I missed the presentation by the author of the report, Lone Rose, due to my return travel arrangements but I found a copy of the report on my way round the exhibition. Part of the study highlighted that there is a lack of formal training for therapists in relation to seating assessment and provision. On reflection of my own training, most of my education on seating has been by learning on the job and working closely with the experienced therapists within my unit. Until I came across the PMG group I had not found any formal training on seating assessment. The PMG provide a really essential service and resource to clinicians like myself and give a wonderful opportunity to develop skills, knowledge and to develop resources and networks with other professionals the specialist seating world. It is also great to know that sessions that I may have missed will be available as online webinars on the PMG website.

During the conference there was plenty of time to browse the many exhibitions and learn about new products on the market. I deal with the five wheelchair services within Scotland but I also find that a number of my patients wish to self fund and therefore I need to know what products are on the market for private purchase as well as those on the NHS budget. If I don’t keep up then it is not long before a patient comes to me seeking knowledge about a new product that they have heard about online.

Attending the conference was a lot of fun too with amazing social events and opportunities for networking. I even met up with some of the staff from my local wheelchair service at the gala dinner and through dancing and chatting and even a conga line we managed to make good connections and have arranged to visit each other’s services in future.

There are a lot of inspiring people involved in the world of seating in the UK and it is great to be part of that. Being from an occupation that has activity at the heart of what we do it was great to see that at the conference, and across many organisations and professions, there was emphasis that alongside comfort, postural alignment and skin integrity that ‘function’ was the ultimate goal for any seating system.

 I have heard previously that the PMG conference is the event to attend and it really did live up to that reputation. So anyone who wants to sponsor me to attend next year, please get in touch!

Reference

Rose L, R (2015) ‘A paralysed System? An inquiry into the provision of local health services for people being discharged from Spinal Cord Centres’. Spinal Cord Injury- All Parliamentary Group on Spinal Cord Injury.