PMG

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***Feeling Hot Hot Hot! Can ventilation improve posture?***

Attending the PMG 2019 conference was a great couple of days, listening too and mixing with other colleagues and companies, all of whom have a common interest and passion in posture and mobility, one way or another. Listening to the clinical case study, titled: Feeling hot! Hot! Hot!, was a great learning curve. Being a professional that works with people with profound seating and postural needs, often my patients also suffer with or have difficulties with overheating and sweatiness and it is well known to be a huge factor in an individual’s comfort, engagement, skin breakdown and quality of life, to name a few.

It was lovely to hear about the patient focused team at Guys and St Thomas’ Wheelchair Service as they weren’t prepared to provide just the ‘normal’ moulded wheelchair and methods of ventilation for a patient which significantly overheated, as these alone were not meeting the clinical need. The results are beautifully portrayed in their results, in which a patient, Rafael, who was requiring several clothes changes each day, unable to have the heating on at home for other family members, required up to 4 fans to help cool, had multiple changes of in situ slings and also as a result had unwanted behaviour such as scratching. All of these aspect’s and the consequences of overheating improved, resulted in a much happier and improvement in quality of life not just for the patient but also his family / care team.

The company, wheelAIR were contacted by the wheelchair services and they provided a custom backrest for the service user. In which channels and space in the mould were made, for the cooling fans to be positioned in the ideal location, around the back and bottom of the chair. They spoke about how studies show that when someone sits down on a wheelchair, the backrest will heat up 2.2 degrees Celsius within 30 minutes and this progresses as time goes on, so that wheelAIR product is able to reduce this amount of temperature rise and therefore directly the amount of sweating in the area.

From a physiotherapy perspective, providing patients with the optimum postural support in wheelchairs / seating is vital to prevent any future deterioration in posture. The added benefit of this system of cooling is that no aspect of postural support on the chair is compromised due to the technology.

Overall, this is a really lovely example of how relatively new technology / engineering is working successfully within NHS services to improve a patient’s quality of life by reducing overheating, although this outcome appears to be down to the pro-activeness and the patient centred focus of the wheelchair department, looking for that next and ideal solution to a problem. I hope that other services will follow and by increasing the knowledge in this area, as a result more patients similar to Rafael will also benefit.