**The Power of Networking**

Networking? They said! It’s just a ‘jolly’, isn’t it?

My inspiration for this piece started as a conversation at the PMG Annual Conference Dinner. After attending the PMG Conference as a bursar I

initially, had thought that I would write about one of the thought provoking sessions on 3D printing in custom seating as this is an area of huge interest to me or perhaps the parallel session on pressure care which was equally of interest to me. However, it was after a few conversations I felt truly inspired to return to work and push myself forwards and out of my comfort zone through my experience of networking.

What is networking anyway? Networking is defined as a supportive system of sharing information and services among individuals and groups having a shared interest. It is a two way and ever evolving experience driven by and unique to that individual. I am not inferring in any way that there is no benefit of attending lectures and seminars, I am simply stating that I believe the benefits of networking are by and large completely underestimated.

The keynote speaker for the first session of the first day at the Conference was Ade Adepitan MBE. During his talk he recounted to us his experience of contracting Polio as a baby in Nigeria and how this began his journey to where he is today. I was particularly captivated not only by what he was saying but also his relaxed, witty and engaging presentation style. As someone who has always shied away from public speaking I thought it was fantastic that he felt confident talking to such a large group of people in such a dynamic way.

During the break Ade made himself available to talk with conference attendees I told him that I thought his presentation was well delivered and inspiring, especially to someone who is very nervous of public speaking. Ade said that I should take inspiration from what he had said and that I should keep pushing myself forwards to do things that were difficult and if I failed then that should make me try even harder. It was just a conversation but to me it was a very powerful one.

Later on the same day we had the Annual Conference dinner to attend. Just a social affair one may think. However, for me it was more than that, I got into conversation with a colleague who has vast wheelchair service knowledge and is also on the PMG committee. During this conversation I was encouraged to think about my future within the wheelchair service and as a professional with regards to where I should be aiming in the future. I mentioned the conversation that had taken place with Ade, earlier in the day and also that I was considering the possibility of completing a poster presentation for PMG next year. I said that I would not consider standing up and presenting this but that it was a step towards pushing my boundaries further. I was told that my confidence was my barrier and that I should be pushed outside of my comfort zone with regards to this and my career progression. I left the Conference Dinner that evening and indeed the Conference itself thinking, “Do you know what? Maybe I’m going to do this!”

I would like to say that the seminars relating to the world that we are working in every day are invaluable not just to improve knowledge but to reduce feelings of isolation and share solutions. They are constrained though from the perspective that it is a passive experience and we can only take so much from them. The exhibition is the perfect opportunity to update our knowledge on the latest equipment where we wouldn’t get time in the busy working environment. However, I think that the power of networking with experienced colleagues should be recognised too.

There are a vast number of professionals out there who are very confident of their skills, knowledge and ability, however I’m sure there are an equal number of others who like me have a valuable contribution to make but we just need the confidence boost and a push in the right direction. When we don’t always have time to encourage one another in the busy working environment, what a wonderful and valuable opportunity the PMG Conference is to reach out to everyone.

So I have returned to the real world of busy clinics and waiting lists. How do I feel now? These two conversations alone have improved my confidence within my work place and I am investigating the option of a poster presentation for next year. The rest, as they say remains to be seen……watch this space.