

Brachial Plexus Injury Newsletter

Welcome to the Spring Edition of the Brachial Plexus Injury Newsletter. We hope you enjoy reading it and would love to hear your comments and views. Any contributions that you would like to make to the newsletter would be most welcome.

We will send this newsletter out as hard copy to your postal address but if you wish to receive it in electronic form then please inform Beverley with your e-mail address.

What's going on in this edition ?

It's a boy!

Brian's role as an orthotist

Golfing information

More sports information

A patient's story

Research into quality of life after BPI

Our website and other useful websites

It's a boy!

We are delighted to announce that Debbie Clyde, Occupational Therapist, had a beautiful healthy baby boy on January 19th, named Adam. We wish them well.

As Debbie enjoys time out with her newly extended family, the service offered by Occupational Therapy on the BPI team is now being co-ordinated by Leslie Wallace.

Welcome to a new OT

Leslie worked in London at various hospitals for 4 years before moving back to Glasgow. She has been working as the Hand Specialist OT in the Spinal Injuries Unit, part time for the last 9 years. She deals with all splinting, upper limb rehabilitation and works pre and post operatively with patients undergoing specific reconstructive surgery.

Feedback from issue 1

As you can see from the title of this newsletter we have stuck with the not very catchy title! I would like to thank the two folk (Lyndon and Derek) who did make some suggestions for the name but unfortunately they weren't voted in... sorry!

I would like to thank those of you who have given us positive feedback on our first edition but we do really need your input to help make this a newsletter that contains what you want to know and share. So go on, pick up a pen, tap that keyboard, get in touch and use the exercise as part of your physio regime!

Contact the News Team

Beverley Wellington
Clinical Nurse Specialist in Orthopaedics
Victoria Infirmary, Langside, Glasgow, G42 9TY
or email Beverley.Wellington@gvic.scot.nhs.uk

Brian tells us about his role as an orthotist

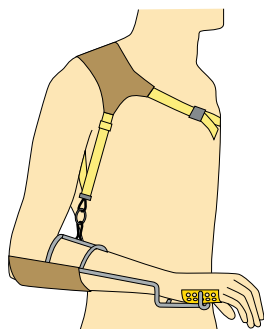
I have been providing Orthoses (supportive braces) for patients who attend the BPI clinic for almost two years. The patients that tend to benefit from an orthosis are those who have suffered fairly severe injuries to the brachial plexus, often from high impact trauma such as motor cycle accidents. These patients are often young, motivated individuals who are keen to get back to a normal life as soon as possible and will often wear their orthosis for many hours every day. The average age of the all male group of patients I have assessed to be suitable for a Brachial Plexus Orthosis has been just 35 years.

- The aims for fitting an orthosis to an adult BPI patient are usually to:
- Prevent shoulder joint pain and subluxation (partial dislocation)
- Prevent or reduce contractures (joint stiffness)
- Improve the cosmetic appearance of the affected limb
- Aid positioning of the hand to increase function

A suitable orthosis for a 'flail' (loose and floppy) arm needs to take the weight of the arm to prevent shoulder subluxation but to allow some shoulder movement for dressing. It should also allow the elbow to be locked in a number of positions and should hold the wrist and hand in the most functional position for that individual.

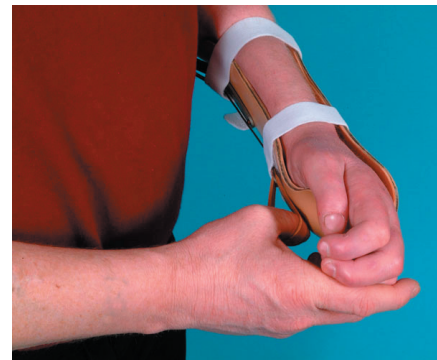
A company called WILMER make two designs of orthosis:

The shoulder orthosis (see picture right) is very effective at preventing shoulder subluxation and it holds the elbow at a preset position but it does not allow the patient to easily change this



position and can lead to elbow contractures with long term use. It holds the hand in a position which can be useful for activities such as typing.

The elbow orthosis allows for locking and unlocking of the elbow, but does not control the shoulder. It may not be suitable for patients with a full brachial plexus lesion unless they have had a shoulder fusion.



The Stanmore Brachial Plexus Orthosis - the most commonly prescribed brachial plexus orthosis kit in the UK



A company called RSL Steeper provide a kit of components for their Stanmore Brachial Plexus Orthosis. This is the most commonly prescribed brachial plexus orthosis kit in the UK as it achieves all of the orthotic aims. A forearm section supports the wrist and hand, a steel side-member then connects this to an elbow joint which can be locked

in six positions. This elbow joint section is attached to another side-member which connects to a mechanical shoulder joint. The weight of the arm is then taken through a shoulder socket.

The manufacturer's kit contains a ready made shoulder and forearm section but custom made sections (made from plaster casts of the patient) are often used instead as they allow for a more comfortable orthosis which will achieve better cosmetic results for the individual.

There is considerable research going on into the use of silicones and carbon fibre materials in the production of lower limb orthoses and it is hoped that some of these materials will be beneficial in upper limb orthoses for brachial plexus patients. The main advantage of this technology is that the shoulder and forearm sections can be made with greater flexibility for comfort whilst being reinforced with carbon fibre in the areas where strength is required. Another benefit of using silicone is that it can be colour matched to the patients' skin, which should improve the cosmetic appearance of the orthosis.

Brian McLaughlin

Golfing information - The One-Armed Bandit !

For any of you who think that continuing a sport or taking one up may be an impossibility, then consider this impressive story I heard several years ago.

I was treating a patient who was also a friend of a friend. We were talking about golf and she was telling me that her husband played off 12. For any of you who don't know what that means, it means that on average he takes 12 extra shots more than the par for the course. Not bad. However, she then told me that her husband had a brachial plexus injury 17 years previously in a motorbike

accident and had lost the use of his right arm. His handicap before his injury was 4. (Bandit!) So with only his left arm to swing a club he now plays off 12. Very impressive!

There is a Scottish one-armed golf society
Contact:

The one-armed golfer's society
11 Campbell Place, Torrance

Tel: 01360 622476

JG

More sports information...

Physical activity is known to help lift people's mood and give people a general feeling of goodwill.

Did you take part in any sports or activities before your accident? Or perhaps its something you always thought about - but didn't get round to yet? Perhaps it's something you haven't done since school!

Whatever, it's never too late to try. From walking to water-skiing, tennis to sailing - the list goes on!

Whether with friends, family or on your own there are lots of options for you to try. To help you get started is a list of websites to help you take some action.

Go on - you might even have some fun!

www.charlieswaterskiing.co.uk - water-skiing in Lochearnhead, Scotland

www.scottishdisabilitysport.com - developing physical recreation throughout Scotland

www.bscd.org.uk - British ski club for disabled (sites across Scotland)

If any of you have sporting or hobby stories to tell, whether it's adapting to overcome a difficulty or just having fun please share it with us (photos are always welcome!!)

LW

A patient's story

Before my accident I'd never even heard of the brachial plexus injury. It wasn't until last April when I found out about it when I was knocked down while cycling to work. I had surgery last June to help repair some of the nerve damage to my right arm. It was a very complicated and long operation, and the extent of my recovery won't be known for at least a couple of years.

Perhaps the thing that sets this injury apart from the others, such as broken bones (I have these too!), is the nerve pain. My pain varies from day to day, which can make planning ahead difficult as I never know what pain I'm going to wake up with. It can also interfere with me getting a good night's sleep. However, The Pain Clinic in Edinburgh are working with me all the time to control my pain. At the moment I'm taking Gabapentin three times a day, Amitriptyline once a day for the pain and I have Temazepam on the odd occasion to help me sleep. I've only just started taking Amitriptyline but I feel it has already eased some of the pain and it's helping for a better nights sleep.

Physio is an important part of my daily routine now. I go to physio once a week. We work on all my injuries from the accident, but concentrate mainly on my right arm and shoulder, as I've been going to the gym (when I'm not being lazy) to concentrate on the other injuries myself. I also have stretches and exercises for my brachial plexus injury, which I do daily at home.

The injury has pretty much changed every part of my life from writing, driving and playing football to working, eating and showering etc. Some of these activities have only changed slightly but some of them are unfortunately gone for good. At the moment I'm trying to teach myself to write with my left hand and I'm planning to go for a driving assessment at Astley Ainslie in Edinburgh to see if I'll be allowed to drive soon.

In the meantime, as my body works on healing, life still goes on and I'm getting on with it. There are things I'll worry about in the future, but I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.

If you'd like to email me, please feel free.
Liamwalls9@aol.com

Liam Walls

Research

I would like to thank those of you who have made contact with me following my invitations to a number of you to participate in my research this year into the quality of life experienced by patients following BPI. I shall keep you posted on the progress of this and the final report, whilst maintaining absolute confidentiality and anonymity for anyone who has agreed to be involved. Thank you very much!

BW

Useful websites

www.brachialplexus.scot.nhs.uk

Site still under construction, but we hope to soon have links with the newsletter, our new patient information booklet, annual reports and we welcome suggestions for any other items to be included.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk / www.cas.org.uk

Citizens Advice, Scotland provides free information and advice to help clients with a range of problems including debt, issues with benefits, housing, legal matters, employment etc.

www.neuropathy-trust.org

Telephone 01270 611828

The Neuropathy Trust is committed to a better future for all sufferers of peripheral neuropathy and neuropathic pain. Through education and communication, the Trust aims to raise awareness of these neuropathic disorders and provide a lifeline to all sufferers.