

# Brachial Plexus Injury Newsletter

Welcome to the Autumn 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 ?

A patient story  
Useful websites  
Life as the BPI service administrator  
New baby - (photos!)  
'And finally'....  
Our website and other useful websites

## A patient story

### My name is Pauline Larmour. This is my story...

I had a brachial plexus injury in March 2007. Before my accident, I was working fulltime in the NHS as a psychiatrist in Aberdeen after my husband and I moved from Sydney, Australia in 1999.

As a way of relaxing after work and meeting new people I took up horse riding and eventually bought my first horse. As I started to take part in competitions, my husband decided to have riding lessons.

I horse became 2 and we looked after them ourselves at stables. I had now moved on to the sport of eventing and had lessons to train the horse and myself. I began working on my overall fitness after my first cross-country jumping competition where halfway round, I began hoping that the horse wasn't as tired as I was!

I started running and to begin with could barely make it to the end of the road and back. After a while, I managed a good few miles so along with five other girls, we ran in a team relay challenge race with stages from Fort William to Inverness. I also did a couple of duathlons (run, cycle, then sometimes run again) with my husband.

We were feeling pretty fit and decided to go on a horse riding expedition in South America. Our holiday was wonderful and our own horses had a holiday too in a grassy field away from the stables.

My accident happened the day we got home. As we went to lead the horses back from their holiday field to their usual pasture the horse I was leading started jumping around and tried to

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### 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](mailto:Beverley.Wellington@gvic.scot.nhs.uk)

run away. I pulled him round but the next thing I knew, he whipped round and took off, catching me with a back foot as he went. My whole arm immediately went cold and numb. I had felt and heard the horse's hoof hit me just above my left elbow so I thought I just had a 'dead arm' and I sat down for a moment to recover but my arm was still numb and dangling lifelessly on the walk to the stables.

In the A&E department the doctors discovered I'd dislocated my shoulder. I went home with it in a sling with an outpatient appointment a few days later, when I learnt I had something called a brachial plexus injury and that I might not be back riding my horse for at least a year – yikes!

I read about brachial plexus injuries on the web and began to understand the seriousness and long-term nature of the condition and the possibility that I might not recover the function of my arm.

Initial scans and nerve conduction tests were encouraging but a doctor friend warned me that I might experience nerve pain as my arm began to recover. Two weeks after the injury, that set in with a vengeance. I had started attending physiotherapy at the hospital and my GP started me on the standard cocktail of drugs and referred me to the national brachial plexus service in Glasgow for further assessment and treatment.

My husband and I have both been determined to look forward and despite my best efforts, I haven't been allowed to turn into a couch potato. We went to my in-laws' holiday flat in France. There were two bikes there and after riding one in the car park, which turned out to be easier than I thought, we spent much of the week exploring the surrounding countryside by bicycle.

As the options for riding safely I-handed were more limited back home in Aberdeen, husband hit on the idea of a tandem. After a weekend of instruction in starting, stopping and riding safely, we are eagerly awaiting the arrival of our own machine!

An exploratory operation in Glasgow at the



**Riding a bike turned out to be easier than I thought.**

end of May, confirmed that the nerves had been stretched but not completely torn. I have been extremely fortunate with my injury, as my arm has recovered steadily over the months since my accident. My sleep was badly disrupted at the start but is now back to normal and I have been able to gradually reduce my medication to a level where my pain is under reasonable control most of the time but I am 'with it' enough both to do the things I enjoy and to remember that I've done them.

Physical activity has been a key factor in my recovery over the months. When the pain was really bad and I was waking every hour during the night, the only thing that seemed to help was getting out and walking round the streets with my sling. After 15-20 minutes, the pain would start to ease off.

Before the accident, I had entered a 10k road race. I had stopped running after the accident and planned to withdraw but husband suggested I swop my entry to the 5k race and do it walking. I was apprehensive about taking part at all and in bad pain all the way to the race. A friend joined me and I ran the whole way and even beat my friend at the end in a sprint finish. What a sense of achievement it was to run and to finish that race and at the time, a real boost to my self-confidence. I began running again after that and have recently started my own brand of floppy-handed swimming! Like everyone else I have my ups and downs. I

realise that, in the greater scheme of things, my injury has been relatively minor and that I have been very fortunate in the care and support I have received both from the professional staff in Glasgow and Aberdeen and from my husband, friends and family.

I hope, nevertheless, that my story may be helpful to others who may be as yet in the early stages of recovery from their brachial plexus injury and trying to find a way forward.

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## Product Review - Yankz Surelace System

I discovered a great product a few months back that allowed me to tie and adjust the laces on my running shoes, without asking for help!

The Yankz surelace system comes in a vast range of colours and the website also has an amusing instruction video on how to fit the laces.

They are supplied by a company in Edinburgh called Anatom Ltd who were happy to deal with me directly but I also found them at my local running shop in Aberdeen (Run4It).

They allow you to slip your trainers on and off quickly but they feel as snug on as when I was lacing up my shoes in the normal way.

As well as for running, I think they'd be great for travelling when you might need to have your shoes on and off at airport security.

They cost around £4 a set but having tried them, I don't think I'll go back to conventional laces even after I recover from my injury.

### Supplier details are -

Anatom Ltd

Links House, Warrender Park Road

Edinburgh EH9 1DT

Telephone: 0800 0323505

E-mail: [info@anatom.co.uk](mailto:info@anatom.co.uk)

[www.yankz.com](http://www.yankz.com)

# Life as the BPI Service Administrator

I worked in the Orthopaedic Department, Victoria Infirmary, since 2003 but have been the administrator for the Brachial Plexus Injury Service since it was designated a National Service for Scotland. My background is in engineering, but following a career change I have been with the NHS since 2000, working in various hospitals and departments - in London and Glasgow.

I am mainly involved with the administration side of the Service; ensuring all relevant information is collected/recorded, organising clinics, and really anything else to help Mr Hems, Beverley, Jane and Leslie/ Debbie. I do find this interesting as no two days are the same and it is good to see something well planned coming together and turning out well! I am also responsible for the administration of the National Service for Scotland / Children's Service, based at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Yorkhill, Glasgow.

I particularly enjoy working on different projects and am currently working on a new website - one that will have a lot more information for patients as well as important information for medical/ clinical professionals. This is taking a wee bit longer than I had hoped. Although I use the internet on a daily basis, (probably a lot more than I should - but we'll keep that quiet!!!), when you actually sit down and try and create some pages and link them together that's when the complexity of it all jumps out.

I am available in the office (0141 201 5436 - or email:[david.mckay@sgh.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:david.mckay@sgh.scot.nhs.uk), Monday - Friday 8am - 4pm. I am happy to deal with any general queries you may have regarding the service, or other queries such as requesting

contact details - feel free to ask and I'll do my best to help. As I have worked for the NHS for a few years I have built quite an extensive database of tricks and shortcuts that sometimes come in useful!

For anyone who is having to think about a career change I would definitely recommend the NHS, (although I can only speak for the Administration and Clerical side of things). The vacancies are posted on the website: [www.show.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk), and often encourage a career progression. With the recent pay rises and better holiday entitlement, (I'm not sure if anyone's heard of Agenda for Change!) - we are actually now, only just mind you, approaching the breadline!

I look forward to hearing from you.

**David McKay**

*Administrator for the Scottish Adult Brachial Plexus Service*

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## New baby

We are delighted to announce the arrival in May of a beautiful baby girl to one of our young patients Iain and his partner Catriona. Congratulations!



## “And finally...”

### 10 things you don't want to hear from your Doctor when having an operation!

1. Everybody stand back! I lost my contact lens!
2. Well folks, this will be an experiment for all of us.
3. FIRE! FIRE! Everyone get out!
4. Oops!
5. Has anyone seen my watch?
6. Come back with that! Bad Dog!
7. Wait a minute, if this is his spleen, then what's that?
8. Hand me that...uh...that uh.....thingy
9. What do you mean he wasn't in for a sex change!
10. Damn, there go the lights again...

### Useful websites

#### [www.brachialplexus.scot.nhs.uk](http://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.limblossinformationcentre.com](http://www.limblossinformationcentre.com)

This online resource has been created to guide individuals with congenital or acquired limb loss and their friends, family and carers through the emotional, physical and psychological process of coming to terms with limb loss.

#### [www.murray-foundation.org.uk](http://www.murray-foundation.org.uk)

The Murray Foundation is active in providing information and support services for those affected by limb loss or absence across Scotland and has a wide network of support groups.