

# Brachial Plexus Injury Newsletter

## In this edition...

Welcome to the Autumn 2010 edition of Brachial Plexus News. There's lots of interest in this edition.

We have...

- Therapies Day feedback
- Professional Study day feedback
- Announcements
- Mirror Box Therapy
- Driving adaptations
- Website updates

## Mirror Therapy



Although mirror therapy is not an entirely new concept it is still fairly new in relation treating pain following peripheral nerve injuries. It is

exactly as the name suggests a treatment technique which uses a mirror image of the unaffected limb to treat pain. It was initially used to treat phantom limb pain which some patients experience after limb amputation and also for other more complex causes of pain.

After nerve injuries the part of the brain which helps interpret pain and how we respond to pain is affected. This is because the pathway from the arm to the brain is no longer continuous, some of the 'wires' which help bring information to the brain have been 'cut'. The area of the brain that the messages were previously brought to is still there but not able to get the message. So what happens to that part of the brain? It often fires off pain messages because it does not know what else to do.

Mirror therapy can be used to dampen the pain messages by pretending to the brain that the other arm is still fully functional. The patient sits with the unaffected limb in front of a mirror so that they can only see the unaffected arm and its mirror image. Simple movements are carried out by the patient and when these are being done the patient can often become less aware of their pain. Sometimes there is no lasting benefit but nevertheless it can be a useful additional dimension for patients who are having difficulty controlling their pain. If you are interested in more information contact Jane Green via email. [jane.green@ggc.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:jane.green@ggc.scot.nhs.uk)

## Driving Adaptation Information

### Legal requirements

If you have had or currently suffer a medical condition or disability that may affect your driving you must tell DVLA, failure to do so may incur a fine of £1,000. You will be required to provide details of any new condition or disability or one that has become worse since your licence was issued. It is important that you inform DVLA regarding your change in circumstances immediately. They require you to complete a medical questionnaire & this can be downloaded from the DVLA website.

### DVLA contact details

DVLA, Drivers medical Unit, Swansea, SA99 1TU

Tel: 03007906806

Mon – Fri 8:00 am – 5:30pm

Sat: 8:00am – 1:00pm

E-mail [eftd@dvla-gsi.gov.uk](mailto:eftd@dvla-gsi.gov.uk)

### Driving assessment

Some people may benefit from going for a driving assessment to identify equipment required to enhance the driving experience. The assessment centre in Scotland is based at Astley Ainslie Hospital in Edinburgh but they also have a mobile assessment unit available & they visit hospital sites in Dundee, Aberdeen, Inverness, Paisley, Irvine & Dumfries to carry out assessments. Referrals require to be completed by Consultant, GP or Clinical Nurse Specialist.

This services offers assessment for people who wish to commence, resume or continue driving following an illness or injury. The centre also provides advice on vehicle adaptations & modifications to enable safe driving or passenger travel for those with a disability.

### Adaptations

Adaptations to cars range from simple steering balls to more complex equipment with the ultimate aim of making driving safer & more manageable. Adaptations are available through Motability (you require to be receiving higher rate DLA to qualify for a Motability car), or can be completed independently. Many adaptations can be fitted alongside the standard controls so other drivers are still able to drive the car.

Primary driving adaptations are adaptations that help you to steer, brake & accelerate. If you have difficulty holding or turning the steering wheel, or have the use of only one hand a steering wheel ball or tripod grip could be fitted to the steering wheel. As well as helping you to turn the wheel easily, it can be fitted with further switches to help operate indicators, horn & main beam flash / dip lights.

If you have weakness in your arms, lightened power-assisted steering may help reduce tiredness in your arms when driving.

Drivers with limited finger dexterity or weakness in the wrist might benefit from having a key turner fitted. If hand movement is limited, push button ignition can be a good solution. Many manufacturers are now fitting some of the options as standard in their vehicles therefore careful consideration of current function when choosing your car is recommended.



*for people with reduced hand & wrist function*



*Steering Wheel Ball*



*Quick release option allows the Steering Ball to be moved by others driving the car  
Tripod steering Aid*

Difficulties with applying & releasing the hand brake due to limited upper body strength can be solved by an easy button push, cantilever hand brake or even an electric hand brake. If you have limited strength in your arms an easy release hand brake will reduce the amount of effort required to apply & release the handbrake.



*Easy Release Hand Brake options*

## Infrared controls

If you have limited or reduced upper limb function, infrared controls can bring everything you require to your fingertips. They make it easier to manage certain functions (up to 18 functions) in your car, which make it safe & more comfortable to drive.



*Infrared control unit*



*Infrared control unit attached to Steering Wheel Ball. To activate the function you require you simply press the button of that function.*



*Electronic Hand Brake*

As with buying any car or fitting adaptations independently it pays to shop around. Steering Wheel Ball can range in price from £35 -55 with different options available with quick release function. Infrared controls vary in price depending on the number of functions you are looking for it to do & most companies state POA.

If you require any further information contact me in the Occupational Therapy Department at the Victoria Infirmary on 0141 201 5244 .  
CMcG

# 1<sup>ST</sup> Patient Therapies Day

November 2009, New Victoria Hospital, Glasgow

We were very pleased to put on our very first Patient Therapies Day early in November. The format for the day was to provide some education and information in an informal setting with some other fun activities too – these included indoor golf target activity, ‘shooting baskets’ and cookie icing (this provided much laughter and some artistic efforts!). Small prizes were given for the best score at golf which went to James Williamson and the best cookie (as judged by Mr Hems) went to Tommy Murray.

22 patients were invited to the event. 9 attended on the day with a total of 11 family members or friends being present for the day - a total of 20 persons.

7 out of 9 patients completed an evaluation for the day with 5 out of 11 accompanying persons completing the form with 1 other unidentified form. 13 forms in total were completed out of 20 (65%)

## Distance travelled to the event (one way)

3 persons travelled 1-10 miles

4 travelled 25-50 miles

3 travelled 50-100 miles,

3 travelled 100+ miles

## Sessions

From the many sessions on offer the top 3 chosen as of most interest by those present were: TENS , Relaxation, Sports fun exercise (given by Jane, Beverley and Brian)



## Other suggested topics by those present for future days included:

- Group discussion to see how people cope
- Sports adaptations / Sports exercise / Sports facilities available
- Stress relief alternatives

## Overall rating for the day

4 rated Good

3 rated Very Good

6 rated Excellent

## Other comments

*‘skills shown very helpful to patients’*

*‘as an onlooker..good to see interaction between patients relating to each other’*

*‘very informative workshop’*

*‘found individual sessions very helpful’*

*‘day was very informal and staff very friendly’*

*‘I would recommend this workshop to anyone suffering from this injury’*

Many thanks go to Brian for helping with the sports exercise, Jane for the catering organisation and Mandy for the cookies and hand massages (not at the same time!!) – but mostly to all patients and accompanying persons for making it such a successful day.

BW

## Scottish National Brachial Plexus Injury Service

### 30.04.10 Study Day Evaluation

This event was hosted for professionals from all disciplines from across Scotland and eventually 23 people attended the study day coming from various health regions including Dumfries & Galloway (9), Greater Glasgow & Clyde (9), Lanarkshire (2), Highland (1) and Fife (1).

The delegate audience comprised staff from nursing (8), occupational therapy (7) and physiotherapy (8).

The content of the day included presentations from Tim Hems on the role of surgery and nerve transfers and Jane Green spoke on rehabilitation following brachial plexus injuries. The next session included talks from Andy Hart and his physio from Glasgow Royal on functional muscle transfer and rehabilitation post op. Our own OT, Claire McGeehan, drew the morning session to a close with a talk on her role.

After lunch there was a thorough presentation from an anaesthetist who highlighted some key factors of pain management:

- To address the patient's experience of pain on all levels:
  - The sensory
  - The emotional
  - The meaning behind the pain
  - The resulting physical and psychological disability

- To optimize pain relief
- To educate the patient
- To encourage rehabilitation
- To encourage self management
- Team approach

This is certainly what the brachial plexus injury service team aim to do.

I then followed with an introduction to alternative care strategies and then Brian, our orthotist, showing upper limb orthoses.

We thank the 2 patients, Brian Hewatt and Jean Gray who attended to help us with our demonstrations.

Overall we received very positive and congratulatory feedback for a day well received by the delegates.

Further information on this event or the lectures given can be obtained from Beverley – see contact details.

### Contact Details

**Beverley Wellington** 0141 347 8062  
(Clinical Nurse Specialist)

**Jane Green** 0141 347 8685  
(Specialist Physio)

**Claire McGeehan** 0141 201 5244  
(Occupational Therapist)

**David McKay** 0141 201 5436  
(Service Administrator)

## Website Update

Due to the success of the web site we have decided to try and improve our existing site - we have been getting "hits" from all over the globe (Australia, South Africa, New Zealand etc). The aim of the new site is to make a "one stop" resource for brachial plexus injured patients, their carers and also health professionals treating patients with brachial plexus injuries.

We have tried to design the new site to be as user friendly as possible. We have split it into various sections, (Patient info, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, etc), along with links to other useful information, newsletters, clinic information - basically all information the user would need right at the click of a button.

Obviously, there will be some things we've missed so we would be grateful if users could drop us an email with their thoughts! Also, we shall list all our up-coming events - such as Study Days and Patient Therapies Day - as soon as we have definite dates. We will keep users up to date with any latest news we have as it becomes available.

Contact details, phone numbers and email addresses are clearly defined on each page, so should you need to contact us for whatever reason this is easily done.

We hope to go live with the new site in the next few weeks, and look forward to hearing any comments you may have.

*David McKay*

## Announcements

It is with great sadness that we announce the sudden passing of Michael Nelson (05.05.79 – 04.06.10).

Our thoughts are with his partner Sharon, their 3 young boys and all of his family.

*BW*



*Baby Kenzie Zander Oag*

We are delighted to announce on behalf of Paul Oag and his partner Yvonne, the arrival on 27<sup>th</sup> April of a healthy and handsome baby boy called Kenzie Zander Oag. The team send congratulations to all the family.

### Useful websites

#### [www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)

The Department for Works and Pensions. Advice on benefits and services including attendance allowance, carers allowance, disability living allowance, incapacity benefit and statutory sick pay.

#### [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

Jobcentre Plus. Part of the DWP, supporting people of working age from welfare into work, and helping employers to fill their vacancies.

#### [www.dvla.gov.uk](http://www.dvla.gov.uk)

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. Information for drivers on subjects including fitness to drive and medical conditions, disabilities and adaptation to vehicles.

#### [www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk)

The Citizen's Advice Service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free information and advice.

## Contact the News Team

Beverley Wellington, Clinical Nurse Specialist in Orthopaedics, New Victoria Hospital, Grange Road, Glasgow, G42 9LF or email: [Beverley.Wellington@ggc.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:Beverley.Wellington@ggc.scot.nhs.uk)