

Spinal cord injury conference Guttman 2019 – Life is full of possibilities

Personal injury solicitor Dan Easton discusses this year's Guttman conference, an annual educational event for spinal cord injury specialists. The theme of this year was 'Life is Full of Possibilities' and speakers at the conference discussed a wide range of topics from yogic breathing to Amazon's Alexa.



By Daniel Easton

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Dan is a serious injury lawyer who deals with cases relating to serious and life-changing injuries such as brain and spinal injuries, as well as asbestos exposure claims. You can follow Dan on twitter at @leighdaydan



Tags: exoskeleton, Guttman conference, personal injury
Related Areas of Practice: Accident and personal injury

Northern Ireland seems a long way to go for a meeting (especially when your flight is delayed several hours!) but if there was ever a conference on spinal cord injury worth attending, Guttman is it.

Named after Sir Ludwig "Poppa" Guttman, the founder of the Paralympic Games, Guttman is an annual educational event for spinal cord injury (SCI) specialists. This year it was the turn of the Belfast specialists to host us, and they did a grand job. The title "Life is Full of Possibilities" said it all, and the presentations really encapsulated the spirit of the meeting.

We initially heard from Claire Guy, principal physiotherapist at the Welsh Spinal unit Rookwood Hospital, about their trial of the REX bionic exoskeleton. "Exoskeletons" give rise to a futuristic vision of Terminator type equipment, but we heard how it was not sold to patients as a walking device, but rather as an aide to neurological rehab and physiotherapy with "Rexercises". Although exoskeletons carry a heavy price tag (£100,000) when I had the chance to catch up with Claire afterwards, she highlighted how the REX means the equipment can help one person do the same job that usually requires four members of staff, so the savings (and benefits) could be considerable.

The link between fatigue and SCI was then addressed by occupational therapists from Dublin's National Rehabilitation Hospital, serving as a strong reminder that not all SCI disabilities are visible. Fatigue can be a chronic problem having a major impact on quality of life, but may not always be addressed by healthcare professionals. We heard how focussing on fatigue management can have a really positive impact and can even reduce pain symptoms.



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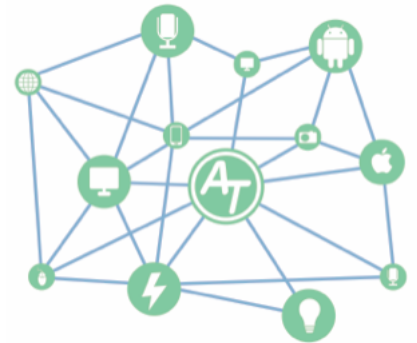
The afternoon sessions taught us the potential benefits of yogic breathing and meditation, thought to have a significant benefit on quality of life, improving sleep and assisting with pain management.

We heard about the importance of physical activity to address chronic health complications (cardiovascular disease and diabetes), a particular problem following SCI. Exercises which can be continued from a hospital environment into the home can have significant benefit and there are many resources out there, such as Spinal Injuries Association's (SIA's) online videos, [including their very own Dan Burden's shoulder exercises](#).

One of the most impressive talks came from Gareth Rowan, of [assistive-tech.co.uk](#) who suffered a C4 complete injury in 2014. His talk opened with the quote from American Disability Rights Activist Judy Heumann "For most of us, technology makes things easier. For a person with a disability, it makes things possible". And Gareth proved this to be true, demonstrating the changes he has made to his home with Amazon's 'Alexa' and 'Echo' he showed how independence and quality of life can be significantly enhanced at relatively low cost, introducing digital controls for lights, TV, phones and messaging.

There were many other talks and the information in all of them was invaluable. The importance of understanding cannot be underestimated when dealing with claims for those who have suffered an SCI injury and at Leigh Day we pride ourselves on our specialist knowledge. We maintain strong links with the SCI community, supporting leading charities like SIA, Back Up and Stoke Mandeville Spinal Research, without whom advances in research and understanding may not happen. Guttman 2019 advocated that "Life is Full of Possibilities" and after attending the event, we have to agree.

Leigh Day work with the [Spinal Injury Association](#) and is proud to sponsor Carol Barraclough, one of the SIA's Peer Support Officers. To contact Leigh Day's specialist spinal injury team telephone 020 7650 1200 or email postbox@leighday.co.uk



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