

UKABIF (The United Kingdom Acquired Brain Injury Forum) 3rd Annual Conference
10th November 2011
The National Motorcycle Museum, Birmingham

Report by Varsha Gandhi, Neuro-Physiotherapist,
EBTNeuroPhysio, Exeter

The UKABIF 3rd annual conference congregated over 200 professionals working directly and indirectly with patients with acquired brain injury, such as neurologists, neuro-surgeons, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, neuro-psychologists, nurses, case managers, carers, healthcare policy makers and researchers in the field of brain injury. The objective of the conference was to educate and create awareness amongst the service providers of the latest developments in the field acquired brain injury by bringing in experts from within the country as well an international speaker.

Professor Li, a consultant physician in Rehabilitation Medicine and Honorary Clinical Associate Professor at the University Department of Medicine, Tung Wah Hospital, from Hong Kong gave a presentation on Mental Imagery (MI) for Neurorehabilitation; a technique used to facilitate and enhance motor performance in patients with stroke. MI is based on the principle of neuroplasticity. Professor Li provided research data demonstrating the brain's ability to form new connections and learn tasks by performing mental rehearsals prior to carry out the actual physical task.

Elizabeth Buggins CBE, Chair of NHS West Midlands, discussed an extremely relevant topic of new commissioning arrangements and the impact this could have on specialist services for acquired brain injury.

Professor David Bates, Emeritus Professor of Clinical Neurology at Newcastle University gave a presentation on Coma and Persistent Vegetative State (PVS). Describing the brain stem as the 'on-off' switch of consciousness, Professor Bates gave an interesting synopsis of the history of diagnosis of brainstem death, and what evidence to look for to reach this diagnosis. Neurologists now follow a specific code to diagnose brain stem death and go through a thorough clinical diagnostic system with different levels of urgency before pronouncing death as the patient can be an organ donor.

Neurologist Dr Nicolas Davies, discussed encephalitis, which is inflammation of the brain caused by infection. This can cause severe brain injury. Although there are many types of encephalitis across the globe, incidences of encephalitis are relatively low when compared to other causes of acquired brain injury.

Professor Simon Shorvon of the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery in London, talked about post-traumatic epilepsy and its treatment. Epilepsy is a condition where there are recurrent seizures. Seizures after head injury fall into the following categories: (1) immediate (within 24 hours of brain trauma) (2) early post-traumatic (in the first week after brain trauma) or (3) late post-traumatic (after the first week of brain trauma). Treatment involves

trying to prevent seizures with anti-epilepsy drugs. There is no evidence to suggest a correlation between preventing early seizures and the onset of late seizures.

Sheona Khan, Lead Speech and Language Therapist at Hunters Moor Neurorehabilitation Centre and Catherine Wickens, Senior Specialist Dietician at South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust together discussed the importance of nutritional support after an acquired brain injury. They noted that there is often significant weight loss, as there can be problems with swallowing. To achieve optimal nutritional status, feeding needs to be started at least 72 hours after admission to hospital and can be achieved orally, via nasal tubes or percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) tube.

Professor Barbara Wilson, Senior Scientist/Clinical Neuropsychologist, from Cambridge and the Oliver Zangwill Centre spoke about creative assistive aids and cognitive learning techniques for memory rehabilitation for people surviving with head injury.

As a neuro-physiotherapist I gained valuable information from this conference that I can directly apply as I treat my patients as well as understand the direction in which new rehabilitation research is progressing. I also gained awareness of various resources available for service providers in UK. I would like to thank BISWG for their bursary which made my attendance at this conference possible.