

57th International Spinal Cord Society (ISCoS) Annual Scientific Meeting 25th Australian and New Zealand Spinal Cord Society (ANZSCoS) Annual Scientific Meeting

This summary records a three-day programme of presentations, workshops and interactive dialogue at the 57th International Spinal Cord Society (ISCoS) Annual Scientific Meeting, combined with the 25th Australian and New Zealand Spinal Cord Society (ANZSCoS) Annual Scientific Meeting held Down Under at Sydney's International Convention Centre positioned on the waterfront at Darling Harbour on 13-15 September 2018.

The conference began with opening remarks by the ISCoS President Professor JJ Wyndaele and a Welcome to Country ceremony by Uncle Chicka Madden of the Gadigal clan of the Eora Nation. This session was followed by the first plenary session discussing children and youth with SCI: evidence, assumption and research priorities by Dr MJ Mulcahey, an occupational therapist with over 30 years' experience. This session was followed by several workshops, instructional courses and an oral presentation including an inspiring session on spirituality after spinal cord injury. After lunch, Professor Simon Darcy gave the second plenary session; "From rehabilitation to living, working and playing: understanding human rights and social approaches to disability citizenship post spinal cord injury". Simon Darcy is a professor of social inclusion and an environmental planner and access auditor. He has the lived experience of exclusion as a power wheelchair user and his research focusses on developing inclusive organisational approaches for diversity groups and understanding the social impact of organisations and individuals. The day concluded with a Welcome Reception address by Professor James Middleton and an Australian Aboriginal corroboree - a dreamtime through dance, music and costume.

The next day was fully packed with more exciting and inspirational presentations. The first plenary speaker, Associate Professor Marc Ruitenberg, spoke about the role of post-traumatic inflammation in acute spinal cord injury and focussed on what is now known about this process and how it can be incorporated in possible treatments, in other words how current knowledge from preclinical research can be translated in ways that might have positive outcomes for patients. The second plenary speaker of the day, Professor Jan Friden, gave a presentation on restoring hand function through surgery.

Held in the Grand Ballroom on Friday night was the conference dinner with fine food, live music and of course dancing to the early hours of the morning.

The final day was equally jam-packed. The conference attendees were given a peek look into the future by futurist expert Craig Rispin who highlighted the incredible speed in which new technology and inventions are popping up and how our lives are almost fully controlled by our smartphone. Having asked the audience to keep an open mind, some of the facts Craig provided were mind-blowing and maybe even a bit scary. Last but not least, a great presentation by Dr Stanley Ducharme, a clinical psychologist from Boston. Stanley spoke on what life looks like for a person with spinal cord injury living in a rural area where the resources are often limited. This plenary session was followed by a final round of workshops and instructional courses to conclude a great overall conference.

The Spinal Network sponsored workshop 12 on the final day, titled; "Better Together: Building Capacity for Integrated Knowledge Translation and Consumer Engagement in SCI Research". The four speakers Dr Heather Gainforth from the University of British Columbia and the three-Johns (John Chernesky from the Rick Hansen Institute, Dr Johnny Bourke from the Burwood Academy of Independent Living and Mr John Shepherd from the University of Toronto) aimed to discuss ways on how to better engage people with the lived experience in SCI research.

The group pointed out the importance of including people with lived experience into research as this would likely result in improved study design, make recruitment easier, and help in securing funding.

The speakers provided the audience with some handy DOs, but also with some valuable DON'Ts. Heather Gainforth mentioned in her presentation that researchers are often stuck on 'repeat' in the cycle of research; they write a grant, get funding, do the research, publish the data and do it all over again. She argued that more focus needed to go on how the findings from the research can result in real change for those living with SCI, in other words translating the research to clinical practice.



There were over 200 posters and it was great to see so many entries from researchers from Australia and New Zealand. Posters covered many topics including surgery, assistive technology, paediatric SCI, spinal injury in rural setting, etc. The three days contained several instructional courses on various topics such as collecting SCI datasets, FES exercise and electrical stimulation. And last but not least, the conference featured over 25 exhibitor displays, showing their latest gadgets, products and information brochures.

The day concluded with a Closing Session in which prizes for the best posters and presentations were announced. In our eyes, the Spinal Network would like to point out three great posters being:

- ❖ Poster 103 Mrs Marjan Verbeek, Mrs Rachel Harper: OT Royal Rehab Sydney; "Assistive Technologies: Enabling workplace inclusion for individuals with spinal cord injury".
- ❖ Poster 134 Dr Amy Richardson, Dr Jo Nunnerley, Dr Johnny Bourke, Dr Sue McAllister, Dr Ari Samaranayaka, Dr Martin Sullivan, Professor Sarah Derrett; "Secondary Health Conditions following Spinal Cord Injury".
- ❖ Poster 215 by Mr Posenai Patu, Samoa Spinal Network; "Living with SCI: A journey of hope".

The Spinal Network thanks ANZSCoS President Dr Raj Singhal and the executive committee for bringing Australia and New Zealand to the forefront, with world leaders, in the field of research and rehabilitation related to spinal cord injury. The ISCoS work in the South Pacific where there are more injuries from falls from Coconut trees was an encouraging read [> South Pacific Report](#).

ANZSCoS 2019 will be held at the Pullman Melbourne Albert Park in Victoria, Australia on 21 - 23 August 2019, with **ISCoS 2019** being held in Nice, France on 5 – 7 November 2019 **A Bientot!**