

SPINAL NEWS

WINTER 2024

**What a Year!
Reflecting on our Winter Activities**

**My Life Wellbeing Conference RDS, Stories,
Expert Advice, Community Support,
Fundraising Events and lots more!**

COLOPLAST NURSE LED CLINIC

With our Specialist Nurse Debbie



Could you benefit from our

FREE Intermittent Self Catheterisation (ISC) reviews?

- ? Have you been on antibiotics for a UTI more than twice in the past 12 months?
- ? Do you suffer with irritation or pain around the point of insertion?
- ? Do you suffer with increased frequency, urgency and/or urinary incontinence?

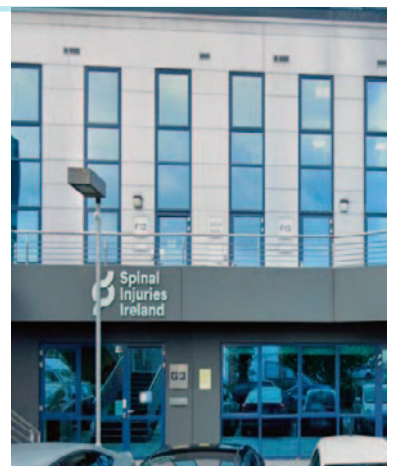
To arrange your **clinic appointment** on the **first Tuesday of every month in Dun Laoghaire** or to arrange a **virtual consultation (phone or online)** with our experienced nurse, please contact our clinical coordinator:

Phone: 01 9190192 or Email: nurseteam@coloplast.com

Please contact us to enquire about regional clinics in Drogheda, Cork and Waterford

Clinic Location:

G3 The Pottery, Bakers Point, Pottery Road, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin





WELCOME

Spinal Injuries Ireland is a nationwide community of service users, families, carers, staff, healthcare professionals, volunteers including our directors and all our supporters and donors and in 2024 we certainly pulled together to support and to provide services and grants to everyone who is living with a spinal cord injury.

As you are aware it was also the thirtieth anniversary of Spinal Injuries Ireland and in that time, we have increased our service provision to over 2,500 people without receiving any further funding from the state. This means of course that we need to fundraise for 70% of our costs annually. Unfortunately, we do not always manage to break even but this year we did thanks to the generous funding received from Flutter as their charity of the year which ensured we would finish the year in a good position.

We were also very fortunate to receive funding from Coloplast to hold a conference in the RDS in November. Over 300 people attended and heard from international speakers and visited the exhibition with all the latest services and products for people with a SCI. If you did not get a chance to attend, you can read all about it on pages 4 & 5. We will run a conference again in 2026 and will be announcing the date early in 2025 so you can put it in your diary.

2024 was also the first year we ran our accessible challenge to Costa Rica and the feedback was very positive. If you are interested in coming with SII in 2025 please let us know.

The Christmas campaign is currently live and if you can contribute towards counselling services for 2025, please do.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy Christmas and best wishes and good health for 2025.

Kind Regards

Fiona Bolger CEO

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This magazine contains real life features and SII does not endorse any products or services listed within.



MY LIFE WELLBEING CONFERENCE 2024 BROUGHT TO YOU BY COLOPLAST



A Day of Insight and Innovation at the SII My Life Wellbeing Conference

On November 2nd, the RDS Concert Hall in Dublin was buzzing as over 300 attendees gathered for the Spinal Injuries Ireland (SII) My Life Wellbeing Conference, sponsored by Coloplast. This important event brought together the SCI community, including participants with SCI, their family members, healthcare professionals and academics. The conference featured international speakers from the world of health, research and academia, who shared the latest research and personal stories. The MCs for the day, Peer Officers, Gemma Willis and Jack Shannon-Cole kicked off the event, interviewing Ireland's Paralympian Heros - Kerrie Leonard (Archery) & Britney Arendse (Weightlifting). Great to get insider's story from the Paris24 Olympics as well as their plans for future games.

The day featured engaging talks from notable speakers.



Dr. Marco Baptista, Chief Medical Scientist from the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation in the US presented groundbreaking global research on potential cures for spinal cord injuries.



Dr. Eimear Smith, Rehabilitation Consultant from the Mater and NRH Hospitals, discussed what this research means for patients in Ireland.



Ronan Langan, who leads the DCU Exoskeleton programme, showcased his work on exoskeleton technology, with a live demonstration by Jack Kavanagh that captivated the audience.



Fergus Farrell shared his story of building mental resilience after his SCI and how living with a hidden disability impacts on his life.



Tabitha Fung International Tennis Player and Speaker spoke about how she manages the challenges of her SCI and how exercise has helped her with her rehabilitation.

The conference provided a valuable opportunity for knowledge sharing and support within the spinal cord injury community. The high turnout and enthusiastic participation underscored the importance of such events in empowering individuals and advancing research.

The day concluded with the Irish premiere of "Super/Man: The Christopher Reeve Story," celebrating the life and advocacy of the beloved actor. Attendees also explored an exhibition area featuring the latest resources and innovations in spinal cord injury care. With plans already underway for the next conference in 2026, the commitment to improving the lives of those affected by spinal injuries continues to grow.

For those unable to attend, recordings of the speakers' presentations will be provided on our website, social media channels, and in our e-newsletters.



Conference Exhibition Hall

In addition to the presentations, our Exhibition Hall offered attendees a chance to explore a wide range of resources and innovations in spinal cord injury care. From assistive technology to community care, legal and financial advice, the hall was a hub of valuable information. The Coloplast nursing team and the NRH team were on hand to meet with participants, offering advice and information about their services.

Along with the goodie bags given out at registration, lunch was provided, adding a touch of hospitality to the day. Attendees were also treated to the soothing sounds of Sean Boland, who serenaded us with his dulcid tones ahead of his Christmas doorman singing stint at Brown Thomas. Sean ran our raffle for 20 Google nests kindly donated by our friends in Google!



SpinalArt Exhibition



The SpinalArt Exhibition, curated by our ‘artist in residence’ Susan Farrelly, CES warrior and art facilitator extraordinaire, was a highlight in the Exhibition Hall.

Susan showcased photographs of a handful of our artists—Olivia, Tim, Tadhg, Julie, and Ger—capturing their workspaces and the essence of their creative processes. The exhibition also featured some of the art journals, bringing to life the experiences of working and their unique take on the subjects covered in the workshops. Susan's mentorship weaves through everyone's work, highlighting the supportive and inspiring environment she fosters as she tutors our SII artists. As a result of the exhibition, Susan signed up a bunch of new artists, who headed off with their art packs ready to go online and engage with Module 1. Anyone interested in taking part, can log in to www.spinalinjuries.ie/spinalart and register. **This is free of charge to SII service users.**





Thank you!

We were delighted by the positive response from everyone who attended our conference.

The team at SII extends a big thank you to all participants for your support and enthusiasm. Your presence made the event special. We're already looking forward to our next conference in 2026 and hope to see you there!

We received over 100 positive responses, far too many to print here. Here's a taste of what people had to say:

"Transformative, so critical to get together "in real life" with the other service users as well as your lovely selves."

"Amazing"

"Excellent conference with a variety of speakers, great interaction with peers."

"Very well organised with a friendly team greeting all attendees."

"A great opportunity to learn about new innovations. A great social occasion getting to meet peers face to face."

"The talks were fantastic even the ones I didn't expect to like just blew me away. The stalls were great too."

"The 2024 My Life Wellbeing Conference was an enlivening, informative and positive experience."

"Excellent, really glad I went and Congratulations SII for hosting and running a great conference."

"Extremely informative, interesting presentations and very well organised conference. Energised leaving."

"The conference was informative, engaging, inspiring and I left with a sense of both belonging to a community and positive hope for the future."



NEWS FROM THE NRH



New Programme Manager NRH

The National Rehabilitation Hospital (NRH) has announced John Lynch as the new Programme Manager for the Spinal Cord System of Care Programme at National Rehabilitation Hospital. Many who have been through the Spinal Injury unit will recognise John from his years of work as a senior physiotherapist in the hospital.

John takes over the reins from Eugene Roe, who retired in September of this year. With his extensive experience working as part of an inter-disciplinary team, John has consistently collaborated closely with SII in the past and we are really looking forward to working with him and the rest of the team.

Pizza Evenings

Our pizza evenings are still proving very popular in the NRH with up to 2/3 of the spinal ward coming along for a slice of pizza and to meet the SII team. Connecting with others who understand your challenges when you are still a patient can provide a sense of camaraderie and reduce feelings of isolation. Sharing experiences and emotions with peers can be incredibly validating and comforting.

Our volunteers offer practical tips and strategies for daily living, from managing physical limitations to navigating our community healthcare systems. Patients have reported to us that this firsthand knowledge is invaluable.

Womens Day

SII sponsored goodie bags for the NRH Ladies Day. Now on its 13th year, the event took place on August 27, 2024.

This event is organised to celebrate and support women, particularly those who have been patients at the NRH. As ever, it provided a wonderful opportunity for women to connect, share their experiences, and enjoy a day dedicated to their well-being and empowerment.

Farmers Day

The NRH held its bi-annual NRH Farmer's Day event on 12th October. This year's event put an emphasis on the overall health and well-being of the farming community. SII were delighted to be invited to speak about our services and meet with some former patients about their journeys.

Sports Championships

The National Rehabilitation Hospital (NRH) recently held its 11th Annual Sports Championships from November 11th to 14th, with our own Jack Shannon-Cole officially opening the event.

This event is a highlight for the hospital, providing patients with spinal cord injuries, acquired brain injuries, strokes, and limb absences the opportunity to participate in a variety of sports. This year's event featured over 20 sports, allowing participants to compete or simply try out new activities. Notable past patients and Paralympic athletes, such as Kerrie Leonard and Gary O'Reilly, attended to inspire and support current patients.

Our Peer Support Outreach Team

As ever, Jack Shannon-Cole and Gemma Willis are available to meet with patients on the Spinal Ward.

If you want to contact them directly, email: jack@spinalinjuries.ie and gemma@spinalinjuries.ie

SII at Outpatients

SII have added Mondays to our presence at the Outpatient Clinics in the NRH and are onsite from 9:00-12:30 during Dr Shane Hanratty's clinics.

Hilary, Eleanor, Jack, Noreen and Aimee are on hand to have a chat and see if there is any way we can support.

Contact: info@spinalinjuries.ie

FUNDRAISING NEWS

Flutter Ball & Quiz:

A huge thank you once again to our wonderful partner Flutter for the incredibly generous donations made at their fantastic Flutter Ball. It was a brilliant night, with over 400 people attending and almost €300,000 being raised for people with spinal cord injuries across the country. An absolutely incredible achievement by the team at Flutter and all their partners and supporters. We can't thank them enough.



Cork Jazz Ball:

Another big success story of the year was our Cork Jazz Ball. With almost 200 people in attendance, the room was buzzing and everyone had a great time. Singer Sean Boland kindly volunteered his time to sing during the meal, which got everyone off to a great start (he even auctioned himself off later on in the night, which went down well!), and Sean was followed by a band and DJ late into the night. It was a fantastic night, raising over €30,000 for Spinal Injuries Ireland. A massive thanks to James Whelan, Ellen Whelan, and John Twomey for their continued drive and energy to deliver such an enjoyable and successful event, as well as to Lorcan Lynch for his invaluable input.



Microsoft App:

We'd also like to thank Tim Horgan and the team in Microsoft for what will hopefully turn out to be one of the biggest developments of the year. Tim, who has a SCI himself, approached SII with an idea around creating a voice-operated, AI-enabled neuropathic pain tracker app. We discussed this in depth, including how it might branch out to incorporate other areas of SCI such as bowel and bladder and skin care, and then worked together towards the joint goal of creating an explanatory video to pitch to the various teams in Microsoft, in the hope that we would get engineers, marketers, AI experts and all the other relevant parties required to pull together such a massive project on board. It was a huge undertaking but Tim, along with a small army of volunteers from across Microsoft, were not daunted. Together, during the Microsoft Hackathon week, Tim and his team not only pulled together the pitch video but even went one step further, creating a rough prototype, winning second place in the prestigious Microsoft Hackathon competition. Thanks to the enormous time and effort that Tim and the team put



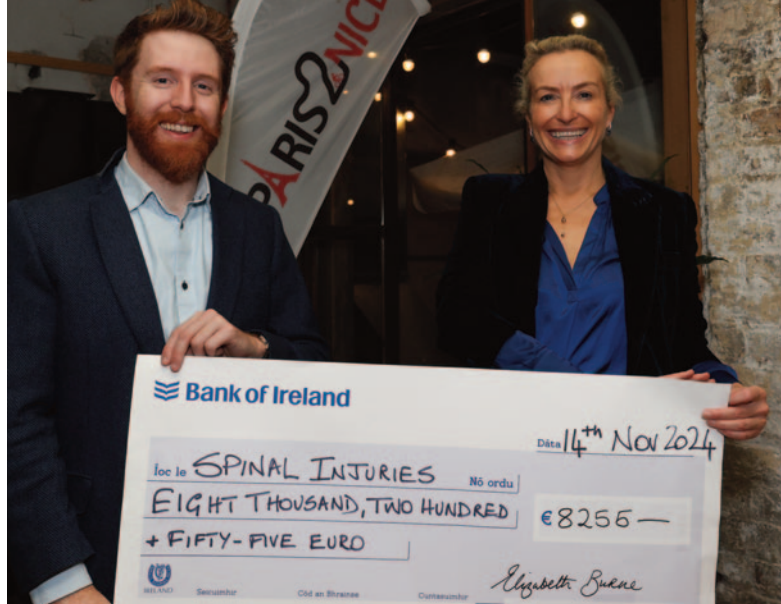
into winning the award, it now means that Microsoft will take the app into consideration for further development. We will wait to see how this progresses but potentially a very exciting development. Watch this space!

Microsoft have also very kindly invited SII in to talk with their staff members about all things SCI, in a pro-active approach to educating their teams further around diversity and inclusivity in the workplace. We are extremely grateful to both Tim and the entire Microsoft team for engaging with the SCI community in this manner. It is incredibly generous of them and is extremely heartening to know we have an ally in such a prestigious giant of the tech world.



Accessible Greenway Cycle

This October saw the second ever Accessible Greenway Cycle along the Great Western Greenway from Westport to Achill. This was not only a tremendous success but a lot of fun, with 25 participants raising over €13,000 for people with spinal cord injuries. Everyone had a great time, capped off by a lovely group meal in the Westport Coast Hotel. Thank you to everyone who attended for making it such a great success. We are looking forward to cycling with you all again next year!



Paris2Nice

A big thanks goes to Tim & Timothy Hurley as well as to Elizabeth Burke, who all took on the immense challenge of cycling from Paris all the way down to Nice over a six-day period. It really is an incredible achievement and we are hugely grateful to you all for the amazing support you've shown us, not just this year but in previous years as well. Thank you!

London Lunch

In September we held our third ever London Lunch, attended by 100 people in the glorious sunshine and beautiful location of Queen's Tennis Club, South Kensington, London. As is tradition, the day kicked off with a fabulous Champagne reception on the balcony overlooking the courts. This was then followed by a sumptuous three course lunch in the President's Suite. The amazing Stephen Cluskey spoke to our guests, an incredible experience for all who were there. Thanks to everyone who attended. Together, you very generously donated over €30,000 on the day. We are looking forward to seeing you in London again next year.



A DAY IN MY WHEELS

A Day in My Wheels continues to develop as a highly interactive platform for educating companies, schools, and other organisations about spinal cord injuries. We have seen the programme grow from strength to strength as we bring it to more and more groups around Ireland.



Our aims with A Day in My Wheels are to educate people on spinal cord injuries, the challenges faced, both visible and hidden, and how to create a more inclusive workplace and more widely a more inclusive world.

The format is a 2 hour session and consists of:

30 minute talk on inclusivity, diversity and employability in the workplace. We educate around what a spinal cord injury is and the challenges faced by those with an injury. We cover what the national picture looks like and what companies can do to improve their inclusivity and diversity offering.

60 minute wheelchair skills training session: We bring 8 wheelchairs to the company for staff to take part in an interactive skills session led by our SII Ambassadors. Our Ambassadors set various challenges (weaving through cones, going up and down ramps, navigating footpaths etc) which both challenge and educate teams in the many hidden challenges of accessibility. This is a fun and memorable way for teams to get a brief glimpse as to what it might be like to have a spinal cord injury.

30 minute Q&A. Our Ambassadors sit down with the team for a coffee to discuss the various hidden challenges of spinal cord injuries. It is a good, informal way for teams to ask questions of our Ambassadors to

garner a deeper understanding of life with an SCI.

In the past six months we have had some fantastic sessions.

We worked with Kirby Group, an engineering and construction company. They hosted A Day in My Wheels on-site at one of their construction sites. We focused on health and safety for their session as there is a constant need to improve worksite safety and understanding in this industry. We had over 40 people attend the session. The Q&A portion of the day was a highlight, with Kirby team members asking a wide range of questions and really listening to the answers from our ambassadors.

The Institute of Education hosted us in September. One of our Peer Officers, Gemma, spoke to a hall of over 100 students. She spoke about her story, from her injury to how she lives life to the fullest now post-injury. The students took turns using the wheelchairs for the interactive portion of the day to leave the school and head over the St. Stephen's Green, experiencing the real world challenges faced every day. We were delighted to be in with the students, they will be the voices and minds of the next generation. We hope this experience will have created future disability advocates to continue working towards a more equal society.



On top of that, this year we are partnered with Flutter Entertainment as their charity of the year. Flutter have been hugely engaged with SII. Continuously wanting to learn more about spinal injuries and how they, as a team in their personal and professional lives, can help support and be inclusive of people with SCI and the disability community as a whole. They hosted two sessions of A Day in My Wheels this year bringing it to more and more of their colleagues. Not only did they take up the two sessions of A Day in My Wheels but they also took on a new challenge; wheelchair basketball!

For the first time, Spinal Injuries Ireland teamed up with Flutter to create a wheelchair basketball tournament. Organised by Peer Officer, Jack Shannon Cole and hosted in the National Basketball Arena, we saw 16 teams of five come together to compete. There were over 80 participants with each team being led by a wheelchair basketball player with a lived experience to really show them how the pros do it! We also had a brilliant audience, cheering every basket made and commiserating every missed shot. Many thanks to the support team who made the day possible. We had winners and losers but the lasting memory will be the

smiles on everyone's faces throughout the day. The teams spent the day learning how to play a fast paced and competitive game while also getting another glimpse into life as a wheelchair user.

Ann Costello from Flutter said: ***"I can't put into words how much everyone enjoyed the day – I am STILL receiving messages about it"***

A Day in My Wheels has continued to give companies around Ireland a better understanding of the challenges faced by people with SCI each and everyday. We know each time we finish a session that we have created another group of people who will advocate for people with SCI and wheelchair users. Not only that, but they have more awareness of their environment and surroundings, even just simple things like moving a bin on a path out of the way.

If your company or a company you know would like to book this diversity and inclusion session please get in touch. We would be delighted to work with you and your team.

Contact oisin@spinalinjuries.ie or Tel@ 01 653 2180



OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS

Each year we have a number of business partners that help support our work at Spinal Injuries Ireland.

We always aim to work with businesses that will not only support our work but also make sense to our service users. All our business partners make sense in being part of our community as they provide services that help support people with SCI. Each year we strive to renew our current partnerships and bring new members into the fold. Our business partners are there as they have committed to being honest and true to our service users whenever they are providing their goods or services. We currently have three sections of business partners and will be continuing to expand these into the future. Legal Practice, Financial Advisors, and Care Providers.

Legal Practice business partners. Consulting a legal firm is something we recommend to all our service users, whether it be for questions around a potential compensation claim or for general legal advice post-injury. Our four legal firm partners provide personal injury counsel nationwide, in particular, each one has understanding, knowledge, and experience in Spinal Cord Injury cases. All four of our legal practice partners are experts in the field. They are well placed to give support and advice, given the uniqueness that each case usually has.

Our Legal Practice Partners are O'Brien Lynam Solicitors (OBL), Lavelle Partners LLP, Augustus Cullen Law LLP, and Coleman Legal LLP.

O'Brien Lynam Solicitors have considerable litigation experience including catastrophic personal injuries, professional indemnity, property and material damage, public liability, employers' liability and product liability.

Offices: Dublin

Tel: +353 1 634 5884

Email: Jack O'Brien jobrien@obl.ie

Website: <https://obl.ie/team/jack-obrien/>



Lavelle Partners LLP are an award-winning law firm with renowned expertise in spinal and personal injuries, based in Dublin and Galway. They have worked with many clients who have suffered serious spinal injuries, successfully bringing claims on their behalf where it was due to negligence by another party. Their team,

headed by Avril Scally, understand the implications of spinal injuries for the person affected and their family.

Offices: Dublin and Galway

Tel: 01 644 5800

Email: Avril Scally
ascally@lavellepartners.ie

Website:

<https://www.lavellepartners.ie/personal/personal-injury/spinal-injuries/>



Augustus Cullen Law LLP's commitment lies in fearlessly advocating for deserving cases, no matter how complex or challenging they may be. Their aim is to bring about real change for individuals who have sustained spinal injuries as a result of avoidable accidents. Their top priority is to ensure that you receive the support and compensation you deserve.

Offices: Dublin,
Wexford, and Wicklow

Tel: +353 404 67412

Email: info@acslsolicitors.ie

Website: <https://acslsolicitors.ie/practice-area/medical-negligence/spinal-injury-claims/>



Finance Advisor Business Partners.

With extensive expertise and experience our Financial advisor partners can support on managing your current finances, advice on how best to deal with financial settlements or claims, and investment guidance. Our financial advisor partners would be happy to discuss anything related to finance to see where they might be able to help.

Coleman Legal LLP specialize in personal injury, and multi-party action cases in Ireland, working tirelessly to help their clients achieve justice. They aim to meet both prospective and existing clients' needs in a professional, engaging and friendly manner with a clear objective to give quality legal advice, and reach a positive outcome.

Offices: Dublin

Tel: (01) 531 3800

Email: info@colemanlegal.ie

Website: <https://colemanlegalpartners.ie/spinal-injury-claim/>



Our Financial Advisor Partners are GillenMarkets and Moneywise.

GillenMarkets is an independent investment advisory firm offering investment advisory services for personal, pension and corporate monies. Uniquely, the company also offers investment training courses for those who would like to learn more about the principles of sound investing, and a subscription-based newsletter/website service for those who would prefer to do the investing for themselves.

Contact details:

Tel: 012871400

Email: info@gillenmarkets.com

Website: www.gillenmarkets.com



Moneywise is an independent financial advisor. They offer pension planning, investment advice, and life assurance protection.

Tel: +353-1-6788011

Email:

alan@moneywise.ie richard@moneywise.ie

Website: www.moneywise.ie



Care Provider Business Partners.

This section of our partners offer more varying and wider range of services. We will be working to expand this section and create new sections in the coming year. Our Care Provider Partners are companies that provide

direct equipment or technology that make life easier, more comfortable and convenient. At the moment this ranges from smart technology around the home to ways to help you sleep better at night.

Our Care Provider Partners are Ideal Technology and Care to Comfort.

Ideal Technology is a distributor and installer of Assistive Technology, Intruder Alarm, CCTV, Access Control, Nursecall, and Home Automation Systems. Systems are designed to suit individuals needs. The systems may include control of door opening, curtain/blind control, light and heating, control of entertainment, computer access, smartphone access, control of iPad and tablets and much more.

Tel: +353 86 255 9508

Email:

info@idealtechnology.ie

Website: www.idealtechnology.ie



Care to Comfort provide custom, made to order Electric Adjustable Beds which provide adjustment to any position you might need. They are a fully Irish owned company and strive for the best quality products.

Tel: +353 (0)1 295 9000

Email:

care@caretocomfort.ie

Website: www.caretocomfort.ie



Chronic Pain Ireland



Chronic Pain Ireland facilitated a 5-week course exploring self-management of chronic pain this autumn for 15 people with spinal cord injuries. This 5-session course (2 hours per week) was delivered online over zoom. It was facilitated by Phil Sizer, who has been involved in the area of pain management for over 20 years. The course focussed on key ideas in the self-management of chronic pain and encouraged participants to explore ways to both manage their condition and cope better. It offered a flexible interactive experience in which questions, feedback, discussion and mutual support were an important part of the process.

Chronic Pain Ireland believes that people living with chronic pain need far more than clinical help. Medication can assist but is rarely a complete solution. Despite the best medical service and even where implants, surgeries are completed, it rarely means that pain completely resolves and therefore ongoing self-management is required.

Throughout the 5-week interactive course all key ideas of self-management were explored, including understanding pain, the relationship between pain and stress, improving sleep and relaxation skills, and understanding emotions.

Feedback was very positive;

"The course is amazing. Phil has a wonderful way with people and explaining and discussing the topics. I think the things I've learned I will use daily. I found it all extremely helpful and thoroughly enjoyed it."

"Taught me how pain works and gave me useful tools to deal with my pain."

"A good helpful course to understanding yourself and managing your pain."

We are hoping to run this course again in Spring 2025, if you are dealing with chronic pain and think you could benefit from taking part, please register your interest by emailing hilary@spinalinjuries.ie or phoning 0858584300

WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE CAMPER VANS



We all know how difficult it is to find wheelchair accessible accommodation.

Going away to get a break often becomes more hassle than it's worth and I found myself missing out on all lot trips away with friends. As a solution I decided to look into wheelchair accessible camper vans. Camper vans in general were very expensive and accessible camper vans were difficult to find. I looked into converting mini buses, campervans and caravans. When planning the size of vehicle that I needed, I wrote out the very mini requirements, measured everything and drew them out on paper and condensed it as much as possible.

- Lift to get in
- Wide door
- Height adjustable bed
- Sink
- Wet room
- Heater
- Simple electronic and water system

After much research I decided that a caravan was the most cost effective and flexible way of achieving my goal - a home from home set up I can bring with me.



I bought a perfectly functioning caravan and pulled everything out until we were left with the bare shell. Between friends and professionals, the caravan began to take shape. The work took about 18 months to complete which was much longer than I hoped but finally after many setbacks we had everything in its place.

I tow the caravan with my car which means when I get to my destination, we can unhitch it and I can still use my car which is something that I wanted. Now I enjoy going away without the worry of places actually being comfortable. I enjoy going away again.

Nathan Kirwan



Research Background

Nearly 1/2 of people living with spinal cord injury in Ireland suffer with neuropathic pain. This type of pain tends to be more intense than other types of pain, results in reduced quality of life, and interferes significantly with people's daily life, mood and sleep.

Most people are prescribed medications such as gabapentin and pregabalin to help to manage their neuropathic pain. While these can be helpful, pain remains in about 2/3 of people. There can also be significant side-effects associated with taking these medications. As a result, there has been a consistent call from people with spinal cord injury for alternative treatments for neuropathic pain.

Virtual walking through the use of virtual reality and "tricking the brain" using imagined movements have shown promise for reducing nerve pain intensity after spinal cord injury. Despite this, the use of actual walking has not been well studied. Exoskeletons, a relatively new invention in rehabilitation, allow people living with spinal cord injury who are unable to walk to walk with the assistance of robotic technology and a trained therapist.



Jack Kavanagh using Ekso NR exoskeleton at the recent SII Life and Wellbeing Conference

Outline of Study

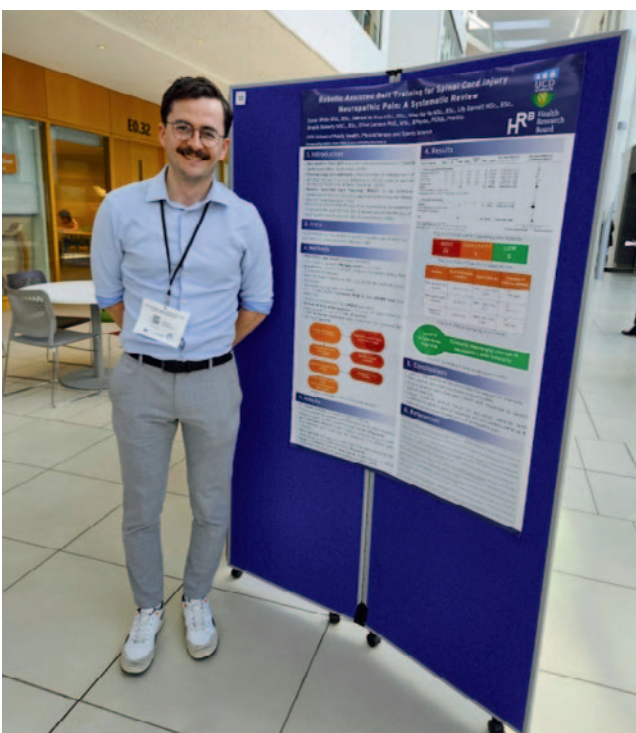
To help explore alternative treatments for neuropathic pain, University College Dublin (UCD) are conducting research funded by the Health Research Board Ireland (HRB) comparing the effects of exoskeleton walking and a relaxation program on neuropathic pain after spinal cord injury. The type of study is known as a randomised controlled trial (RCT) meaning participants have an equal chance of being allocated to either intervention.

The exoskeleton program will take place 3 times per week for 12 weeks in the UCD. The relaxation program will also take place 3 times per week for 12 weeks. 2 sessions each week will take place online and 1 session will take place in person in UCD.

We are seeking participants who:

- Are > 18 years old
- Sustained a traumatic injury above L1.
- Are > 6 months after their injury.
- Have had neuropathic pain for > 3 months
- Are on a stable medication program.

If you're interested in taking part in this study or for more information about the research, please contact **Conor White** via email at conor.white3@ucdconnect.ie.



Lead researcher Conor White presenting at the recent Irish Pain Society Conference

EXPLORING COSTA RICA: ANOTHER STEP IN OUR ACCESSIBLE ADVENTURE JOURNEY



At the start of November, seventeen of us, including six people with spinal cord injuries, embarked on Spinal Injuries Ireland's inaugural Costa Rica Accessible Adventure.

It was a week of exploration, connection, and discovery—both of the stunning landscapes of Costa Rica and the ways we can grow and improve in creating accessible travel experiences.

We arrived in Costa Rica's vibrant capital, San José, late in the evening so after a night of catching up on sleep, we set off for the Arenal, a region known for its striking volcano and lush landscapes. A stop in Sarchí, where we had a painting workshop, gave us a glimpse of Costa Rica's artistic heritage, with its vibrant crafts and welcoming community. Relaxation then awaited at the Arenal hot springs, where amphibious wheelchairs allowed for full participation.

Day three offered a mix of adventure and culture. At Mistico Park, an accessible hike across hanging bridges immersed us in the rainforest's beauty, with guides ensuring everyone could enjoy the sights, including howler monkeys, spider monkeys, coatis and even snakes! Later, a cooking class on an organic farm brought us together over traditional Costa Rican dishes—a moment of shared laughter and connection that many called a highlight, especially the traditional dancing!

The Pacific coast was next, with its golden beaches and rich biodiversity. On the way to Manuel Antonio, an

accessible boat tour on the Tarcoles River revealed crocodiles and a whole host of exotic birds, including ibis, pink spoonbills and scarlet macaws. Manuel Antonio National Park, with its accessible trails, was a chance to explore Costa Rica's wildlife up close, from cheeky monkeys to an itchy sloth! We then took part in two days of adapted surfing lessons which was a huge success. One of our group even got asked to come back to represent Ireland in accessible surfing! Clearly a natural!

As the week drew to a close, the group returned to San José (but not before a quick pit stop in a bar to catch the Ireland vs New Zealand game!) for a farewell dinner featuring local art and a food and beer pairings in the San Jose Beer Factory. All in all, this first accessible adventure to Costa Rica was a major success for Spinal Injuries Ireland. While there were plenty of moments of joy and connection, the trip also underscored the complexities of accessibility. From logistical adjustments to ensuring every participant feels fully supported throughout, there's room to grow. Despite these lessons, the success of the trip was evident. This journey proved that exploring the world is possible for everyone. Thank you to each and every one of you who took part and made it such a special trip. Pura vida!

Put your name down for the waitlist for this trip in 2025.

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