

# Surviving Spinal Injury



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## SPINAL INJURY CONFERENCE ATTRACTS WORLD-CLASS SPEAKERS

Spinal injury experts from across the country have attended a conference in Shropshire where they heard inspirational stories from people living with spinal injury and the pioneering medical professionals working to improve lives of those affected.

*Surviving Spinal Injury - The Journey* event was held at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital (RJAH) in Oswestry where about 100 delegates heard about treatments, research and the latest technology helping people with spinal cord injury (SCI).

The conference was organised by Shropshire law firm and spinal injury specialists, Lanyon Bowdler. Dawn Humphries and Emma Broomfield, of the firm's personal injury and clinical negligence teams, chaired the event said the day had been informative, thought-provoking and a major success.

*"Listening to experts involved in the global pioneering work with spinal injury was amazing. We heard about ongoing efforts to find a cure, cell transplantation and how the latest technology was helping patients through rehabilitation,"* said Dawn.

*"Professor Wagih El-Masri, the eminent spinal consultant, gave us an insight into the development of SCI medicine and his involvement in the tremendous strides that have been accomplished over the last 46 years. He developed and led the Midland Centre for Spinal Injuries (MCSI) in Oswestry between 1983 and 2014 and has treated more than 10,000 SCI patients at acute, sub-acute and chronic stages.*



Top: Dawn Humphries, Chris Bright QC and Emma Broomfield. Left: David Chapple Kay Kelly and Prof El-Masri. Bottom left: Group photo of speakers & hosts from the spinal injury conference.



*"In the mid 20th century, people generally died shortly after a SCI, but survival rates have improved significantly due to the pioneering work undertaken in Oswestry and elsewhere in the country.*

*"Professor Wagih El-Masri is the founder of the charity Spirit, which aims to improve the treatment and care of people with SCI through promotion, education and training across the world. He also founded Transhouse, a charity offering short-term transitional housing for SCI patients who are unable to return to their own home.*

*"Dr Clive Bezzina, consultant in rehabilitation medicine at Royal Stoke Hospital, told the conference about the unique relationship between the hospital and the MCSI.*

“Leading Shropshire firm advising on an extensive breadth of personal injury cases, including high-value claims. Particularly experienced in acting for clients with spinal and cerebral injuries. Also skilled in handling military cases and accidents abroad.

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“The Royal Stoke Hospital is the closest major trauma centre to Oswestry and Dr Bezzina talked about how the medical journey for so many SCI patients begins with them being airlifted to Stoke where they are treated for a myriad of complicated issues. Doctors then prepare ‘battle plans’ to deal with all acute trauma, particularly complications from infection, before patients are transferred to their most appropriate specialist spinal injury unit to receive acute care.

“From his presentation it was clear the Royal Stoke and the MCSI have an extremely strong and fruitful relationship in ensuring the smooth, safe transition of patients.

“Mr Naveen Kumar, a spinal injuries consultant at the RJAH, talked about management of SCI patients, covering the multi-systemic effects of SCI and guidance on assessment and management including some of the controversies and complications.

“He spoke about how there are various components to SCI management, crucial for a favourable outcome, saying the goals were to ensure maximum neurological recovery and independence, a pain-free flexible spine, safe functioning of the various systems of the body and prevention of complications.

“His talk covered everything from initial assessment, importance of referral to a specialist centre, neurological assessment and a range of other medical issues. He also highlighted complications which can arise, and are preventable, which is where many clinical negligence claims arise - usually when the initial treating hospital gets it wrong.

“Mr Aheed Osman, from the MCSI, related recent advances in SCI management, covering a huge amount of ground in terms of on-going research projects worldwide.

“The work of the centre includes research in retrieving stem cells from bone marrow of patients with SCI, incidence of lower limb fractures in patients with chronic SCI and ensuring patients are able to make the transition after discharge from hospital.



Above: Front - Paul Rhodes and Sue Wood, back - Phillip Roberts, Martin Wood and Jane Miles. Bottom left: Rhys in the ReWalker.

“The conference also heard about ground-breaking terminator robotics, an amazing programme which is giving patients much more freedom and independence.

“Obtaining this equipment is costly but for a SCI patient facing the rest of their life in a wheelchair, having the opportunity to be able to walk with the assistance of this highly specialised technology is something you can’t put a price on.

“Then Michelle Bunyon, case manager at Spinal Injury Case Management, spoke about the vital work case managers do to help in the rehabilitation of patients.

“The conference also heard from Chris Bright QC, an outstanding barrister who addressed delegates on the key issues of spinal injury litigation, and several inspirational speakers who have suffered SCI. These included Darren Edwards from Shrewsbury who spent five months at the MCSI after being paralysed in a rock climbing accident just under two years ago.”

View the video of our ‘Surviving Spinal Injury the Journey’ Conference at the Midlands Centre for Spinal Injuries at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital in Oswestry  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=LT4ssB4\\_zew](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LT4ssB4_zew)





*The 2017 edition of The Legal 500 recognises the clinical negligence and personal injury teams in the Top-Tier for the West Midlands.*

## PARTNER RUNS LONDON HALF MARATHON IN AID OF HORATIO'S GARDEN

*By Dawn Humphries, Partner & Head of Spinal Injuries Team (Personal Injury)*



I was delighted and privileged to be able to take part in the inaugural London Landmarks Half Marathon on Sunday 25th March 2018 fundraising in aid of Horatio's Gardens as a supporting event following on from our enormously successful spinal injuries conference, held at the Midlands Spinal Injuries unit at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Hospital in Oswestry.

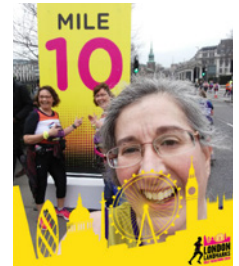
As an enthusiastic runner, it was well within my abilities with the right amount of training in place to do the distance, and comfortably enjoy. However, fate conspired against me, with bouts of more snow than I have ever known, a sprained back and glass in my foot, all of which scuppered my training plans somewhat, and left me rather less prepared than any sane person would wish.

So a little worried, and very well bandaged up, I proudly put on my Horatio's vest. (I was also very relieved that the streets of the Metropolis were not still thick with snow.) So I limped down from Buckingham Palace down the Mall very apprehensive and a wee bit nervous but was soon engulfed into the swathes of excited runners. Over 10,000 of us lined up at the start, and I have to say the organisation and crowd support were phenomenal.

The whole of central London was closed down to traffic for the race. The streets were literally lined with so many many supporters, bands, charities and event organisers dressed in bowler hats, as suffragettes, gladiators, victorians all highlighting the history of London, together with a random man riding a pink unicorn, (who finished well ahead of me!) It was just incredible to be running in such a terrifically joyous enthusiastic atmosphere.

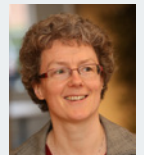
Despite wondering if I could actually complete the course, I passed Trafalgar Square, St Pauls, the Royal Courts of Justice (as a lawyer had to take a selfie here) the Tower of London, then back up The Embankment, before cornering with a sprint finish to Downing Street, all with tremulous applause... who needs to do a full marathon!

Finish it I did! Inspired by the challenges some of my spinal injured clients face on a daily basis with such strength and fortitude. Not my fastest run but certainly the most rewarding and memorable event I have ever done. I am really delighted that so many people sponsored me, thank you all so much, those funds will go to such a worthy cause. It was such a fantastic experience and I am truly honoured to have done it in Horatio's memory.



## WHEELCHAIR AWARENESS

*By Emma Broomfield, Associate Solicitor*



**I was horrified to read that paralympian Anne Wafula Strike took the drastic decision to undergo surgery to have a suprapubic catheter fitted (for which she had no medical need) because she had had such bad experiences trying to access working disabled toilets. On one occasion she ended up having to wet herself on a train journey because the disabled toilet was out of order. Such an experience is humiliating and facing these kinds of issues daily can significantly restrict the quality of life that the disabled should be able to enjoy.**

My colleague Dawn Humphries and I had an eye opening experience at a Wheelchair Awareness Day in Birmingham hosted by No 5 Barristers Chambers, which was held with input from the Back Up Trust, (a UK charity helping individuals who have suffered a devastating spinal cord injury rebuild their independence), solicitor and wheelchair user Raquel Sigantoria (Trustee of the Spinal Injuries Association) and paralympian Steve Brown, Captain of the London 2012 GB Wheelchair Rugby team.

As well as some inspirational talks from their key speakers, and insight into the experience of wheelchair users, Dawn and I were taught some basic wheelchair skills by Back Up. We then completed a basic challenge which included

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“Experienced group of solicitors with a strong reputation in the clinical negligence field. Maintains an impressive track record in complex and high-value matters, recently handling a number of delay in diagnosis and birth injury cases, including cerebral palsy claims.

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manoeuvring through a slalom, reversing and parking - not too bad on a flat surface with nothing else to worry us!

We were then let loose on the streets in the City Centre to try and complete seven real life challenges. These included trying to access a disabled toilet, visiting a cashpoint and purchasing a drink from a café. It was a real eye opener and incredibly hard work to propel yourself on what appeared to be a flat pavement, every slight surface change was gruelling.

As for trying to access the disabled toilet, this proved one of the biggest challenges of all. Although Birmingham Central Library is a modern state of the art building, in which you would have hoped full consideration had been given to providing accessible facilities, this sadly did not prove to be the case.

There was no disabled toilet on the ground floor, the lift initially didn't work and we were faced with heavy fire doors. Having finally manoeuvred through the doorway we were faced with a sign on the disabled toilet to say it was 'out of use'. At this point I began to understand where Anne Wafula Strike was coming from.

Dawn and I encountered similar difficulties when trying to perform the other challenges getting a real glimpse of an insight into how so many day to day tasks can present a huge challenge which can end up limiting the options that should be available, but Raquel Siganporia challenged us to rethink and raise our expectations for those who have to use wheelchairs. There is clearly still a huge way to go in ensuring that accessibility and quality of life for wheelchair users is as good as it can be.

The day also highlighted how high quality, well fitted wheelchair and postural management support can make all the difference for individuals who have a spinal injury. This also



reduces the risk of other medical complications such as pressure sores, chest infections and urinary infections.

In the afternoon we met Steve Brown, who used to be Team GB wheelchair rugby captain, who works with Prince Harry at the Invictus Games and presents as a sports commentator. Steve gave us an incredible insight into how a spinal injury, although catastrophically life altering, can also be a catalyst for amazing life opportunities.

We then took a coach to the university sports hall and soon realised we were in for trouble, when faced with not only a sea of wheelchair rugby chairs, but also people getting changed into sports gear. What followed was a terrifyingly intensive two hour knockout heat of full on, no holds barred, rugby combat, coached by Team GB champions, which was absolutely not for the faint hearted.

The day made a lasting impression on our understanding of what is clearly a massive challenge to those with spinal injuries and their families. It has underlined the importance of helping those with spinal injuries to have the support and equipment to maximise their quality of life.

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