

## EDITOR'S PAGE

## Networks for SCI healthcare professionals

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The International Spinal Cord Society (ISCoS) has always played a key role in facilitating the sharing of resources, research findings, ideas, experience and knowledge between SCI healthcare professionals around the world. This is achieved in many different ways including its Annual Scientific Meeting, website (<http://www.iscos.org.uk/>), elearn initiative ([www.elearnSCI.org](http://www.elearnSCI.org)) and this journal, *Spinal Cord*. The overall aim is to advance the care of people with SCI. To further this cause, ISCoS recently setup International Networks for SCI healthcare professionals including networks for nurses (SCInurse), physiotherapists (SCIPT) and occupational therapists (SCIOT). These professions have been targeted because they are well represented in the ISCoS membership and because nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists do not routinely attend international conferences so therefore have little opportunity to meet colleagues and networks with peers.

The most well developed ISCoS network is the International Network of SCI Physiotherapists (SCIPT). This network has over 1000 members representing more than 90 countries with strong representation and involvement of physiotherapists from low and middle-income countries. It is not only affiliated with ISCoS, but is also a recognised network of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy. It primarily relies on electronic and social media-based platforms for communication. For example, SCIPT has a website ([www.scipt.org](http://www.scipt.org)) through which members can upload powerpoint presentations, videos and documents for all to view. Members are encouraged to share templates of forms they use for discharge summaries, assessments, meetings and equipment prescription. They are also encouraged to upload policies and procedures, teaching material for students, pamphlets for patients, educational videos, reports on quality assurance projects and anything else relevant to SCI physiotherapy practice that can be shared electronically. There are currently more than 150 powerpoint presentations, 180 videos and 140 documents uploaded onto the website by members. The underlying philosophy is to encourage physiotherapists to share their resources so that time is not wasted in all corners of the world duplicating what already exists elsewhere.

Informal and online communication between members is an important aspect of any network especially if geographically-dispersed members can not regularly meet face-to-face. SCIPT has an email-based list server for senior SCIPTs from each country. This email group provides an instantaneous but informal way of communication between senior SCIPTs around the world that has not previously been possible. This might seem like a trivial achievement however, up until recently physiotherapists from one country rarely knew colleagues from neighbouring countries let alone colleagues from other continents. The senior SCIPTs on the email list server are tasked with dispersing relevant information to their peers within their countries. The list-server is supplemented with a facebook page which is open to all SCIPT members. The facebook page is where members can discuss anything relevant to SCIPT. This provides an opportunity for all to informally engage and communicate with SCIPTs from countries around the world. While SCIPT is mostly a virtual community, there are also opportunities for face-to-face interaction at the annual ISCoS and discipline-specific international conferences. All these forms of communication provide an opportunity for all to learn from each other and exchange information and knowledge. This can serve as an important avenue for promoting evidence-based care which in turn can have a powerful influence on clinical practice.<sup>1,2</sup>

There are many potential benefits of professional networks such as SCIPT,<sup>3</sup> SCInurse and SCIOT working under the ISCoS umbrella, however one less obvious but no less important benefit is the opportunity these networks provide to increase cultural and global awareness of issues relevant to SCI among SCI healthcare professionals. These networks put healthcare professionals in touch with peers from an array of different cultural, social, political and economical backgrounds.

The SCI Networks are young but have the potential to include 1000s of professionals working in the area of SCI. However, 'it is only through active participation by all qualified members that the value of [any] network is created for all members.' You can find out more information about these networks by visiting [www.iscos.org.uk](http://www.iscos.org.uk), [www.scipt.org](http://www.scipt.org) or [www.SCInurse.org](http://www.SCInurse.org).

1 Bordoloi P, Islam N. Knowledge management practices and healthcare delivery: a contingency framework. *Elec J Know Manage* 2012; **10**: 110–120.

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3 Hyman JL, Luks HJ, Sechrest R. Online professional networks for physicians: Risk management. *Clin Orthop Relat Res* 2012; **470**: 13861392.