

By Bruce Matsin

Dramatic Advances in Patient Care and Rehabilitation

HIGHLIGHTED AT THE 2ND NATIONAL SCI CONFERENCE

The pioneers of Lyndhurst with their portraits residing in state overlooking the recently refurbished entrance would surely feel a sense of worth to hear the opening remarks of Dr. Milos Popovic, at the 2nd National Spinal Cord Injury Conference Precourse at the Toronto Rehab Lyndhurst Centre on October, 26, 2006.

The 3 day conference highlighted the dramatic advances in spinal cord injury (SCI) research since the founding of Lyndhurst in the 1940's. Researchers, clinicians, educators and consumers discussed the rehabilitation needs and the unique challenges faced by SCI patients as they re-integrate into the community setting.

Over 300 met at Toronto Marriott Eaton Centre Hotel for the final 2-day session to interact at over 25 presentations, workshops, poster viewings, and seminars. Presenters from North American research centres inspired their audience with a wide range of cutting edge discoveries. Practical issues facing the Spinal Cord Injured such as *Optimizing Wheel Chair Safety*,

Parenting- Defying The Odds, and *Sexuality for Women With Chronic SCI* were presented along with topics of treatment and research in SCI. *Clinical Trial Designs for Spinal Cord Research*, *Managing Spinal Cord Pain-Optimizing Outcome*, *Reducing Risk and Spinal Cord Plasticity: Implications for Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation* are examples of research topics that promise rich dividends for future improvement in the lives of people with a SCI. For a complete list of topics covered see <http://www.torontorehab.com/education/scrindex.htm>.

The conference theme, *The Evolving Architecture of Research, Patient Care and Education* showcased a series of advances in SCI understanding. One factor that has helped propel these leaps in understanding is the energy and enthusiasm invested into learning about SCI. More information has been discovered about the spinal cord's function in the last 10 years than in all time prior to 1996. Dr. Geoff Fernie, Vice President Research, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute suggests that increases from just

under \$600,000 a year in 1998 to over \$7 million in 2005 is a measure of the success in attracting grants from a growing number of agencies and foundations.

Most impressive has been the growth in intellectual capital seen at Toronto Rehab's Lyndhurst Centre. In his welcoming remarks to the delegates at the conference Dr. Milos Popovic outlined the astounding growth seen in research activity over the past few years. In 5 years a research team of 12-to-14 researchers has grown to more than 60 of whom 9-to-10 are principal investigators who have been attracted to Lyndhurst. Over \$36 million has been acquired to build state-of-the-art facilities to accommodate an exciting new research venture called iDAPT (Intelligent Design for Adaptation, Participation, and Technology). Located at Toronto Rehab's University and Lyndhurst Centres and at the University of Toronto this facility will offer new hope to people with disabilities. When completed in 2010, iDAPT will focus on research projects "including studies on falls, balance, how winter affects mobility, and how weather and time of day affects driving ability". (Toronto Rehabilitation Institute p9, + 5 Report on Rehabilitation Research, 2006)

One of the more exiting research projects highlighted at the conference involved electrical stimulation of muscles left paralyzed by stroke or SCI. After 8-12 weeks of Functional Electrical Stimulation (FES) voluntary muscle motion is present when the stimulator is taken away. For some patients this research promises dramatic increases in mobility and self reliance.

It is inspiring to see such advances in research, patient care and funding. Coupled with this it is also encouraging to see individuals exited about their work, buoyed on by the rapid rate of progress in a broad range of issues related to SCI. The improvement in the lives of those with disabilities seems to be the inevitable result of this enthusiasm and growth.

The founders of Lyndhurst would be pleased. 

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