

Spinal Injury Design Rehabilitation Workshops

Keywords: design thinking, spinal cord injury, rehabilitation

This project relates to Design & Rehabilitation (Campbell, 2011), an RSA initiative which began in 2009, to teach design to people with spinal cord injuries (SCI) as a route to independence, resourcefulness and greater control over their lives (Campbell, 2009). It began with an initial pilot, a 3 day workshop in London supported by the Back-up Trust. The success of this led to support from The Sylvia Adams Charitable Trust in 2011, allowing the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) to commission a series of design workshops with three pairs of national partners, one of which was Sheffield Hallam University's Lab4Living team working with the Princess Royal Spinal Injury Unit at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals Trust. As far as could be established through literature reviews, the concept of teaching design thinking to patients as a means of improving self-reliability as part of a rehabilitation programme is an entirely novel one.

The project took the form of five 3 hour workshops introducing the concept of design as a way of thinking, interwoven with practical actions to resolve problems that anyone could face in everyday life.

Findings from the workshops and different groups were discussed at an RSA seminar. These included practical considerations such as recruitment, endurance, scheduling with other rehabilitation sessions, light intensity from a projector and patients with oxygen masks. Participant and healthcare staff response was very positive, particularly in having something to focus on that was unrelated to medical considerations. A minority of patients admitted initially to attending as a change to break boredom but staying through interest. Others mentioned increased confidence to request, ask or dictate rather than

being told what to do or passively receiving.

Follow on funding from the Health Foundation is enabling work to continue to assess the impact of this type of intervention and facilitate its future direction. This work will close in December 2013.

References

- Campbell, E. (2009) You know more than you think you do: design as resourcefulness and self-reliance. RSA Design & Society
- Campbell, E. (2011) Design & Rehabilitation. A three-day workshop in design for people with spinal cord injuries. RSA Projects.