

Design's potential agency in changing roles and responsibilities in SCI rehabilitation

Keywords: design approaches, rehabilitation, resourcefulness, changing responsibilities

Question: Can design approaches be used to help increase resourcefulness and resilience, and reduce dependency in spinal cord injury (SCI) patients during their rehabilitation and on their return to the community?

Method: Literature reviews were conducted of: 1) prior work; 2) patient-voiced issues; 3) SCI patient pathways and rehabilitation management models; 4) design literature discussing structured design thinking, skills, methods, and approaches (Kimbell and Miller 1999; Kimbell 2011) to provide a framework for the analysis of tacit skills to be observed in SCI patients. A design workshop comprising a set of separate but related activities was used to observe and record tacit skills used by SCI patients in addressing a daily living challenge identified through discussion with the spinal unit, using the framework for analysis derived from the literature in 4 above.

Discussion: Design research has recently been exploring the application of design thinking and methods in new fields such as service design, and in healthcare (Campbell 2012). There is a small but growing body of literature on the application of design approaches used in these types of context. Healthcare service delivery is facing complex challenges in developing patient-centred 'social model' approaches which can complement or enhance clinical 'medical model' approaches and which allow patients to take more ownership of their recovery. The work described here opens up the discussion about potential opportunities to enhance the rehabilitation pathway and to improve self-management for SCI survivors, how management is conceptualised, and how this affects the relationships between and responsibilities of all concerned.

Result: While this pilot research demonstrated that SCI survivors are able to demonstrate the use of innate 'design' skills (Macdonald 2013), the question remains about the conditions required for these to be practiced, autonomously, in everyday situations.

Figure 1: Spinal Injury Unit staff viewing and discussing SCI survivors' issues and comments from one of the workshop activities. Still from film, 'Design and Rehabilitation', Dir. Claire Levy © 2012

References

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