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**Report on the RI Global World Congress
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My participation in the 23rd World Congress of Rehabilitation International was supported by the Spinal Injury Network Travel Grant in Memory of Rosalind E. Nicholson. The following report can be found on the Network website at: <http://www.spinalnetwork.org.au/research-and-clinical-trials/2016-2017-spinal-network-travel-grants-in-memory-of-rosalind-nicholson>.

The 23rd World Congress of Rehabilitation International was held in the last week of October at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre. These RI conferences are held every 4 years in different locations worldwide, and bring together people with disabilities, advocates, academics, researchers, government representatives, non-government organisations (NGOs) and trade organisations from a range of disability-related fields. The 2016 World Congress was hosted by the Shaw Trust UK (www.shaw-trust.org.uk) and attracted over 1000 delegates from more than 60 different countries.

Rehabilitation International was founded in 1922 in the USA as the International Society for Crippled Children, and in the ensuing years has had a number of name changes reflecting changing attitudes to disability. However the most recent name change, to RI Global, occurred way back in 1972. Although it is accepted that there has been considerable attitudinal change over the past 44 years, especially since the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the anachronistic name of Rehabilitation International remains. Many of RI's current member organisations are advocating for a name change to "Rights and Inclusion Global". It is a further anomaly that RI Global itself was intricately involved in the 10-year drafting of the CRPD – a rights-based manifesto. Now headquartered in New York, RI Global is an organisation with status at the UN, and has delegates at many of its disability-related deliberations.

"Create a more inclusive world" was the theme of the conference itself, and a direct reflection of the right to participate fully in society that people with disabilities now claim. The rights basis for actions of advocates figured prominently in presentations. Promotion of inclusion and universal accessibility was also an underpinning sub-theme for all speakers in the conference programme. In a plenary presentation, Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland, summarised the Scottish commitment to inclusion. Scotland is a signatory to the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs), and has established an Independent Living Fund which is similar to the NDIS in that it gives people control and choice in self-directed supports.

The Labor Government has formed unique cooperative partnerships with Disabled People's Organisation (DPOs). It recognises that people with disabilities are almost completely absent from political office and has created an Elected Office Fund which will proactively assist people with disabilities to stand for government. Such an initiative could be given support in a bi-partisan arrangement in Australia. At present we have only two politicians (out of 800-odd in total) with visible disabilities in Australia - Kelly Vincent in SA and Rob Pyne in Queensland.

A highlight of the conference was a presentation from Euan McDonald, a man with quadriplegia who has developed an interactive Accessibility Review Website, Euan's Guide (www.euansguide.com), which he hopes will gain users worldwide. The site allows people to rate and log the accessibility of any sort of location or activity. Using a voice synthesizer, Euan also gave details on how to participate in Disabled Access Day (www.disabledaccessday.com). DAD is actually 3 days from 10-12 March 2017, and is designed to encourage individuals, venues, organisations, charities, to get involved in, promote or develop, an accessible activity. DAD is a fun way of promoting accessibility. Having been founded in Scotland, current entries in Euan's Guide are predominantly from the UK, but international input is increasing. It is worth a look. The initial conference plenary sessions focussed on Education, Training and Employment. Irrespective of where speakers came from, the data and statistics they quoted had parallels in Australia. And the picture is not yet good.

Highlights of the conference were many. The trade exhibits of interest were those of robotics and high tech assistive technologies, including a moving exoskeleton model designed for those with spinal cord injury and working models of robotic hands and arms. Otto Bock was one of the several wheelchair exhibitors. There were a number of very sleek, lightweight manual wheelchairs on display, and a range of motorised chairs, plus those for children.

I found the conference stimulating and learned much that I will use in my work in Australia. My thanks go to the Spinal Cord Injury Network for enabling me to attend.

Plenary sessions included:

David Ruebain, CEO of the UK's Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) (www.ecu.ac.uk), talked about the need to tackle the underrepresentation of disabled staff in universities and colleges. This is certainly relevant in Australian tertiary institutions, where the staff demographics certainly do not reflect the make-up of the general population. Ruebain outlined the importance of addressing this imbalance in terms of the benefits of having a truly diverse workforce as well as the direct impact on improved outcomes for students with disabilities. The ECU is a policy and research agency which works nationally and internationally through research and programs to address disadvantage. It is guided by its platform of long term strategies to bring about systemic change.

Teresa Burke, from the Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA), a disabled people's organisation, emphasised the need for education which equips people to function well in society. GDA is a human rights organisation which promotes independent living with principles of dignity and respect.

Burke strongly the need for people with disabilities to be visible across all areas of society and the need to counteract the disempowerment which occurs when the non-disabled presume to speak on our behalf. She talked about intersectional disadvantage, the disproportionate effect of the UK Government's 50% austerity cuts on people with disabilities because of higher living costs and lack of access to transport contributing to higher levels of social isolation. Unfortunately these outcomes have parallels in Australia. Using language we also find used by the National Disability Insurance Agency in Australia, Burke talked about the need for the ability to choose how to live and to have control of appropriate supports.

The conference devoted some time to the essential need for inclusive education. Haqeeq Bostan related his experiences of education for people with disabilities in two different countries and with evolving systems of inclusive education. Born in Pakistan, he contracted polio as a child. As a wheelchair user in that country he had little access to schools. When his parents migrated to the UK he was able to go to school. However the system was segregated, and a high percentage of time for all students with disabilities was spent in therapy, so that by age 11 at the end of his years in primary school he did not know the alphabet and could not read or write. A transfer to a high school where all students were integrated into classes turned this situation around, and after graduation from University with degrees in Law and Political science, he has worked as a professional and is now communications director of a large health organisation. His presentation was a reminder of the imperative for inclusive education.

The conference developed this theme further through both plenary sessions and parallel sessions. Scott Thompson, Associate Professor in Education Psychology from the University of Regina (Saskatchewan, Canada) spoke about the need for well-developed transition pathways from inclusive education to inclusive employment. As sheltered workshops have been shut down, people with disabilities have been 'placed' in jobs which are largely structured for the non-disabled, so that government subsidy is needed to compensate the employer for the proportion of that job which the disabled employee is unable to do. Current thinking is to re-structure jobs, or customise the job to fit the employees' capacities. In this new way of thinking, a person with disabilities is then able to do 100% of the job which has been designed to fit their capacities.

Presentations from a variety of governments and from corporations highlighted the developing interest in and commitment to employment of people with disabilities. For example, Barclays have a 'reasonable adjustment team' to ensure that assistive equipment is put in place in a matter of days, plus a mentor program which ensures that a new recruit has support, and are targeting promotion pathways for staff with disabilities. British Telecom has developed the Passport idea in which the employee's assistive technology or personal support needs are documented so that there is a fast track to put things in place as the employee changes workstation. This idea is being implemented by the Department of Defence in Australia. The presentation from Apple computers gave similar examples of proactive employment policies and programs which enable the employees with disabilities to thrive.

Further details are available on the conference website www.reworldcongress.com