

NATIONAL SCI CENTRE WINS INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES

The National Spinal Injuries Centre (NSIC) at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, near Aylesbury is one of the 11 UK specialist centres for the treatment of people with spinal cord injuries, has become the first NHS centre in the UK and one of only five in Europe to receive a coveted international accreditation for excellence in the care of adults and children with spinal cord injuries (SCI).

The National Spinal Injuries Centre offers 110 beds, 66 of these for the rehabilitation of patients with SCI. It serves a catchment area of 14 million people. Around 680 patients are admitted each year, and more than 2,500 patients are seen in outpatient appointments. It was founded in 1944 by neurologist Professor Ludwig Guttmann as a facility to treat service personnel who had suffered SCI in World War II. The NSIC became one of the first centres in England to offer an inpatient service dedicated to caring for younger patients with SCI. The St Francis paediatric ward opened in 2004. St Francis offers six inpatient beds for children under 16, with facilities including an outdoor play and recreation area and indoor activity room.

The centre has been awarded the highest level of CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) accreditation for a three year period. CARF is an internationally recognised independent body that evaluates standards in rehabilitation care around the world. The NSIC's paediatric service, among the first in the country, becomes the only children's SCI service to be recognised with CARF accreditation outside of North America. Assessors from CARF also commended the NSIC's innovative use of sport in rehabilitation - the centre was the first in the country to introduce this as part of patients' overall care programmes.

Stoke Mandeville Hospital is widely regarded as the birthplace of the Paralympic Games movement. Professor, later Sir Ludwig Guttmann began using sport as a vital ingredient in the rehabilitation of spinal cord injured WWII veterans at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, and on 29 July 1948 organised a competition for 16 paralysed men and women on the hospital's lawns to coincide with the opening ceremony of the 1948 Olympic Games in London. The Stoke Mandeville Games for wheelchair athletes began, and soon became an international competition.

The prestigious accolade follows rigorous evaluation by assessors who visited the NSIC in November 2008. They looked at all aspects of the rehabilitation programme for patients staying in hospital and those attending appointments. The NSIC offers inpatient and outpatient care to adults and children with SCI, many arriving following a traumatic event like a car accident. The centre treats patients from across England, as well as abroad, who spend on average six months undergoing intensive rehabilitation to help rebuild their lives. The rehabilitation programme focuses on areas including stamina and strength development, adjusting to a loss of body sensation and creating appropriate diets to help patients return to as normal a life as possible. The programme also encompasses the psychological adjustments of patients to SCI.

The needs assessment and goal planning programme - a multidisciplinary system of support devised by clinical psychologist Professor Paul Kennedy - was praised by assessors for putting patients at the centre of the process, and has been adopted by SCI Centres around the world. The rehabilitation programme also helps patients to re-learn everyday activities like washing, dressing and food preparation. An on-site bungalow allows patients to hone these skills in a safe but realistic environment prior to leaving. Preparing to leave the centre is only one aspect of the tools developed during a patient's stay – patients gain an in-depth knowledge of their injury and any potential complications, and can receive practical advice and information on issues ranging from mobility, including learning to drive, pregnancy and where to find support from peers.

One of the most in-demand services is the successful employment clinic. The NSIC's occupational therapists and outpatient department have forged strong links with the local Job Centre Plus and the Spinal Injuries Association's employment service to help patients back into work. Jackie Bailey is the centre's Patient Liaison Officer and ensures patients have a strong and influential voice in decision making and how the centre is run. She cites initiatives like the employment clinic as a reason CARF assessors recognised the NSIC's commitment to patients. *"It's a truly joint initiative,"* said Jackie, who became a patient after moving to the area in 1995. Jackie fell while climbing in 1980 and sustained her SCI at the age of 17. *We look at all the possibilities in getting people back to work and at each person's skills, then put them in touch with the right people to advise on issues like funding and voluntary placements. We help some return to their old careers, and others to look to new opportunities. It has been so successful and helped a great number of our patients back into work. Often after this sort of injury you can only see the negative side – 'I'll never be able to do this or that' – but rehabilitation is about learning skills so that you can achieve far more than you ever thought possible, with appropriate support where necessary. I've got on with my life and am doing what I used to do. My life is like anyone else's, I just sit down to do it."*

CARF's accreditation highlights the NSIC's reputation as a centre of excellence for patients with spinal cord injury, said Buckinghamshire Hospitals NHS Trust Chief Executive Anne Eden. *"This endorsement provides a platform on which to build services for, and with, our patients to ensure the NSIC continues to be at the forefront of spinal cord injury care,"* she said. *"A series of patient workshops are already underway to better understand their needs, and how services can be further improved. The emphasis on placing patients at the heart of their care programme mirrors the Trust's overall strategy to put the needs of patients first. We're also looking at the areas of practice excellence identified by CARF to see whether they can translate to other specialties within our hospitals, for example in the rehabilitation of stroke patients."*

Centres seeking CARF accreditation are measured against other similar facilities around the world and must demonstrate not only high quality, patient-centred care programmes but a commitment to keep improving services. *"This achievement is an indication of the dedication and commitment to improving the quality of lives of the persons they serve,"* said Brian Boon, CARF's President. *"Services, personnel and documentation clearly indicate an established pattern of practice excellence."* Claire Guy, Rehabilitation Lead at the NSIC, said the decision to voluntarily put the NSIC forward for accreditation reflected a firm belief in the quality services offered. *"Rehabilitation plays an integral part in helping many patients with spinal cord injury get back to leading an independent life,"* said Claire. *"We applied for accreditation because we understand the importance of life roles – in other words what's important to each patient - and place these at the heart of their rehabilitation programme."*

For more on CARF accreditation for spinal injury services, visit their website at: <http://www.carf.org/consumer.aspx?Content=Content/ConsumerServices/spinal.htm&ID=13>