

Neurovision - a one day conference on neurological sight problems

The Mersey Neurological Trust and RNIB Multiple Disability Service have had increasing concerns about the barriers that people with neurological sight problems experience both in terms of having their sight condition diagnosed and then obtaining appropriate support. It was these concerns that led both organisations to come together and hold an event aimed at raising awareness of such issues.

The 100 plus audience attending Neurovision was made up of people with neurological disability and their supporters together with professionals such as rehabilitation officers for blind and partially sighted people, occupational therapists and nurses. Mark Gray of RNIB's Multiple Disability Service chaired the event and did a sterling job of keeping speakers to time, summarising the main points as well as injecting some lighter moments into the day.

The morning speakers aimed to equip delegates with a basic understanding of what happens to visual information beyond the eye. Dr Kyle, Consultant Ophthalmologist, started off the morning mapping the visual pathway from the optic nerve to the brain.

He was followed by Dr Enevoldson, Consultant Neurologist, who provided an absorbing presentation on some of the manifestations of damage to the visual pathway and visual cortex. He highlighted that being able to see an object is of little use without being able to recognise such things as its form, its movement and to be able to give it its correct name.

Dr Enevoldson spoke of the more common sight conditions in people who had experienced neurological damage, such as hemianopia and then fascinated the audience with examples of less common conditions such as the experience of hallucinations.

The conference raised the issue of another common sight problem for people with neurological conditions, that of difficulties with eye movement. Val Trimble, Orthoptist, provided us with an understanding of how the eyes move and the consequences to our vision if affected by a neurological condition.

The morning also heard a pertinent talk from Gina Vaughan who 20 years ago suffered a large brain haemorrhage leaving her with amongst other difficulties, a left sided hemianopia and visual perception problems affecting her literacy skills. Gina talked of her struggle at University to have her sight difficulties acknowledged because they weren't 'straightforward'.

The afternoon speakers focused more on practical solutions for people with neurological sight loss. Tessa Duffy, Speech and Language Therapist opened up the session with a look at the impact of neurological sight loss on communication. She reminded delegates of how much of our communication relies on vision and how difficulties with sight can affect such things as knowing the right moment to join a conversation. She stressed the need for multi-disciplinary working and getting as much information as possible about the individual's communication prior to the onset of a neurological condition.

The day ended with Frank Ainsbury and Gerry Nelson, Rehabilitation Officers for the Visually Impaired who demonstrated through use of a case study an example of how rehab workers can work with people with neurological sight loss.

Overall feedback confirmed the day a success, with requests to run it again in other parts of the country.

Many people with neurological conditions expressed appreciation that this complex subject was at last being discussed, while professionals welcomed the information to facilitate their practice.

Conferences are never without their learning points and the following are the main lessons learned from Neurovision.

- The conference offered a welcomed opportunity for networking.
- It provided a forum for questions and answers.
- It facilitated the sharing of knowledge and good practices from both service users and service providers.
- It highlighted the need for RNIB to further stress to presenters the importance of providing fully accessible presentations.
- The conference was extremely popular and thus delegate numbers had to be limited. Perhaps a larger venue next time!
- It highlighted the need for more events like Neurovision, such as the use of low vision aids with people with neurological sight loss and the use of coloured filters to support people with visual perception difficulties.

Neurovision has opened up essential discussion around issues relating to neurological sight problems. The event will hopefully pave the way to the introduction of working parties to develop models of good practice, and to promote consistency in diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation for people who experience a neurological sight problem.

Information about the two organising bodies:

The **Mersey Neurological Trust** is an independent charity, which runs The Glaxo Neurological Centre. The charity provides information and support to people diagnosed with any neurological condition including Multiple Sclerosis, Motor Neurone Disease, Alzheimer's Disease, Epilepsy, Parkinson's Disease, Strokes etc. The Centre also provides employment advice through the "Working Life Project". For information telephone 0151 298 2999 or visit our website at <http://glaxocentre.merseyside.org>.

The **RNIB Multiple Disability Service** exists to tackle some of the issues faced by people who in addition to a sight difficulty experience other disabilities. This service is offered to people who may identify themselves with the terms: acquired brain injury; neurological condition; learning disability; deafblind and anyone involved in their support. Contact RNIB's Helpline for more information on 0845 766 9999 or visit RNIB's website at www.rnib.org.uk

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