

2010 ASSBI CONFERENCE: Innovations in Neurorehabilitation

The 33rd Annual ASSBI conference was held from 6th - 8th of May 2010 at the Surfers Paradise Holiday Inn on the Gold Coast. The hotel was located 100 metres from beautiful golden beaches and had received a 17 million dollar refurbishment in 2007. The organising committee consisted of Tamara Ownsworth, Margaret Eagers, David Shum, Jenny Fleming, Petrea Cornwell and Gina Geffen.

The conference theme, Innovations in Neurorehabilitation, focused on cutting edge developments in brain injury rehabilitation research and its translation into clinical practice and service delivery across many disciplines. A total of 232 people registered for the conference from all around Australia and New Zealand, with 118 delegates attending at least one of the four workshops.

Invited speakers included distinguished multidisciplinary researchers and clinicians from neuropsychology and clinical psychology (Prof Barbara Wilson and Dr Phil Yates, UK; Prof Skye McDonald, Australia), rehabilitation counselling (Prof Bob Fraser, US), occupational therapy (A/Prof Carolyn Unsworth, Australia), speech therapy (A/Prof Leanne Togher, A/Prof David Copland, Australia) and social work (Dr Grahame Simpson, Australia). The conference attracted 12 sponsors, many of whom sponsored the international and national keynote speakers, including the Motor Accident Authority of NSW, Lifetime Care and Support Scheme, Pearson and Clinical Talent Assessment, Victorian Neurotrauma Initiative and Griffith University.

The workshops on the Thursday were very well attended and covered diverse topics including the application of neuropsychological theories to clinical practice, outcome measurement in brain injury, advances in the assessment and treatment of social communication impairments and vocational rehabilitation and placement models.

One of the greatest highlights of the conference was the opening address by Prof Cindy Gallois on Thursday evening. Cindy shared her husband's story of recovery from aphasia after stroke and their experiences of this long journey together. Her presentation highlighted the importance of supporting individuals to maintain their social group memberships after stroke and to actively advocate for, and create as many opportunities for ongoing rehabilitation as possible. She also encouraged health professionals to consider their own values and identity within their pivotal role in promoting recovery and adjustment to brain injury.

Following this inspirational opening address we had the great pleasure of launching Professor Robyn Tate's new book "A Compendium of Tests Scales and Questionnaires". Professor Skye McDonald did the honours, with her high praise for this book echoed by Professor Barbara Wilson. Delegates then proceeded to the cocktail party by poolside for some enjoyable socialising.

Over Friday and Saturday 54 high quality free papers were presented that spanned the influence of genes on brain injury outcomes, assessment of paediatric and adult brain injury, functional outcomes, evaluation of novel rehabilitation approaches, developments in service delivery and societal and systemic issues. Feedback from delegates indicated that, as usual, difficult decisions had to be made concerning which session to attend due to the great relevance and interest value of all presentations.

On Friday morning Professor Barbara Wilson gave an excellent keynote address on the top ten cutting edge developments in neurorehabilitation as well as future research directions. One the ten areas related to the judicious use of neuroimaging, which was also a focus of A/Prof David Copland's subsequent plenary address. David also presented some exciting new developments in the application of pharmacotherapy in the treatment of language disorders. Following these stimulating presentations, Prof Gina Geffen was made a Fellow of ASSBI and accepted her award from ASSBI President Prof Glynda Kinsella. In the afternoon session, the effects of brain injury were examined across the lifespan with Dr Phil Yates from the UK presenting recent research findings on the role of resilience in social adjustment to paediatric brain injury. In her Presidential address Prof Glynda Kinsella presented interesting data on the cognitive outcomes of older adults with mild TBI. Following this address, a launch was held to showcase a number of new ASSBI resources, including treatment manuals. The conference

dinner at the Courtyard by Marriot was attended by 63 people who enjoyed the attentive service of the restaurant staff, fine food and excellent dinner conversation.

On Saturday morning our international keynote address by Prof Bob Fraser examined the state of the science of vocational rehabilitation. His impressive research programme encompasses long-term outcome studies of job stability and interventions targeting both personal barriers to re-employment as well as broader social and systemic issues. A/Prof Carolyn Unsworth continued on the theme of community re-engagement in her keynote address on innovations in driving assessment. She described the development and validation of OT-DORA, and evidence supporting the clinical utility of this new tool. Our final keynote address on Saturday afternoon was by Dr Grahame Simpson who described a state-wide collaborative approach for assessing the prevalence, course, comorbidities and burden of challenging behaviours following traumatic brain injury in NSW.

Congratulations are offered to all presenters for providing such stimulating and clinically applied presentations. Overall, feedback on the conference has been very positive. I would like to thank the ASSBI Executive for inviting me to convene the conference this year, and also thank the conference committee for all their support. A huge thankyou is extended to Margaret Eagers who worked tirelessly to ensure the conference ran smoothly. Finally, on behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank the sponsors for their generous support and ongoing commitment to the Annual Brain Impairment Conference.

Next year we are off to Auckland in New Zealand where Prof Skye McDonald is convening the 4th Pacific Rim Conference in which the 34th ASSBI conference is in conjunction with the Mid-Year International Neuropsychological Society meeting. I have no doubt that this will be a very exciting conference programme.

Tamara Ownsworth

Chair, 2010 ASSBI Conference Convening Committee