



FUNDING RESEARCH TO END PARALYSIS
(FORMERLY AUSTRALASIAN SPINAL RESEARCH TRUST)
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Hi Bill,

As you know I am a quadriplegic due to a football accident in 1989 and very keen to bring any issues for the benefit of everyone to your attention. In as recent as 2009 I met with Dr Mal Hooper who has his rehabilitation practice HyperMED NeuroRecovery at level 13, 15 Collins St. Melbourne. Dr Hooper has done a lot of work with spinal patients since 2006 when he brought the one and only Lokomat that exists here in Australia to the country. He has also worked particularly with people with Acquired Brain Injury, MS, Cerebral Palsy, stroke and Burns victims and many other ailments.

As far as spinal cord injuries go, in lay terms this is a walking machine and treadmill combined that can precisely duplicate walking for paraplegics and quadriplegic specifically to their personal gait in a very safe way according to their injury and amount of time they have been in a chair. I have tried this machine and whilst I am 20 years down the track and not expecting a great deal to happen for me, I am always very open-minded as to what might happen within my body. In my opinion I strongly believe that this technology could possibly make a significant difference for spinal patients in two specific ways. (1) I think when a person is diagnosed as incomplete and is on the cusp of being able to walk Lokomat could be a vital tool in assisting that person to reach their absolute full potential as against current physiotherapy not allowing that to happen. Having said that, others that may not walk, like myself may have significant benefits and much better recovery using this technology, as used in conjunction with hyperbaric oxygen it is designed to increase blood flow and create movement to increase maximum benefits. (2) I also believe that this technology will play a vital part, when the day comes that a cure for spinal cord injury is found, that is rejoining the spinal cord. I think it will help spinal patients to rebuild muscles and retrain if you like them to walk again.

I have spoken to a number of spinal patients who have attended Dr Mal Hooper's facility and used the Lokomat and it is interesting to note that several of them were diagnosed complete, like myself, but have regained significant movements. One man in particular was a diagnosed complete quadriplegic 15 years post injury and there has significant movements return, so you never know what the body is capable of with the right rehabilitation method. So it poses the question that maybe this technology can do more than people are willing to give it credit for.

Dr Mal Hooper whom I have come to know quite well as a colleague and I really believe is a practitioner who only has his patients at heart and helping them is his utmost priority. Since I have gotten to know him we have collectively met with the Minister for TAC Timothy Holding, Melinda Rockell the CEO of the Victorian Neurotrauma Initiative, senior management of TAC along with Dr Peter Harcourt from the TAC medical committee and James MacKenzie from TAC and some other officials from Workcover. We recently met with Simon Rabl Senior manager from the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development as well as Russell Gruen a leading surgeon and co-manager of the trauma unit at the Alfred hospital.

Everyone has showed much interest in this machine and its technology and I firmly believe that although there are 250 Lokomats worldwide, many of them in spinal units and hospitals, and only one here in Australia, it is a vital time to put some funding into a clinical study to show what this technology can do. Otherwise I fear that this technology may be lost to Australia for good and the people that will suffer and who will be forced to go back to the old inefficient methods of rehabilitation will be the patients.

As a patient advocate for the VNI and as an Honorary Director of Spinal Cure Australia and on behalf of all people living with a spinal cord injury here in Australia I am seeking the best possible treatments to maximise recovery and movement for all spinal patients. I really believe that Lokomat technology is a definite way forward to help people now and in the future.

I really hope that responsible bodies such as the TAC and Workcover access this technology correctly and see that there is much evidence based research to show this technology works and to allow patients who have had an accident under their umbrella utilise and benefit from Lokomat in conjunction with hyperbaric to help maximise their rehabilitation results as a part of their regular program.

I equally hope and would also endorse and urge such funding bodies such as the VNI and the NHMRC, and any other funding body for that matter to assist by funding the first Australian trial of Lokomat and hyperbaric to prove to government authorities the merits of this technology so that people, like myself that fall through the cracks and are outside the realms of TAC and Workcover to be able to access and benefit from this wonderful technology and help maximise rehabilitation results through the PBS scheme as a part of their regular rehabilitation.

At the end of the day what matters here is we spinal patients and our well-being now and in the future. I only hope this will be in the forefront of the minds of the decision-makers.

I would really love you to come and have a look firsthand Bill at this technology at Dr Mal Hooper's practice at your earliest convenience. If you could please let me know I will liaise with Mal for a convenient time that suits us all.

Yours sincerely

Gary Allsop

(Honorary Director Spinal Cure Australia)