

## Report on One-Day Seminar – 18 May 2009

Thanks to Committee Member Dr Rachelle Andgel who provided this overview of the presentations at our first new-format Seminar held at the Northcott Centre in Parramatta.

As advertised, this Seminar had something for everyone – covering three diverse areas and speakers. The Seminar attracted over 70 attendees – a great turnout which vindicates the Committee's decision to change the format of our regular information program.

I have concentrated this report on the first two presenters and left the full reporting of Nicola Clayton's succinct discussion of dysphagia causes and management to her fellow Speech Pathologist, Mandy Stubbs. (I have to admit I wasn't aware that Speech Pathologists are involved in diagnostic testing for dysphagia – and suspect referrals to speech pathologists will go ballistic if this gets out!)

All three topics were enthusiastically received by Network members and friends with Darren, Ron, Diane and Nicola each being presented with a thank you gift on behalf of a grateful audience.

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### **Darren Pereira – Stance Control: Ron Bell's Orthotic Journey**

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*Darren is a specialist in complex lower limb orthotics and has a wealth of experience in the provision of Ground Reaction Ankle Foot Orthoses (GRAFO), Knee Ankle Foot Orthoses (KAFO) and Stance Control Knee Ankle Foot Orthoses (SCKAFO). As a member of the Polio Services Victoria team from 1998 to 2009 he has provided consultancy to over 1,300 polio clients.*

*Since the Seminar, Darren has left Polio Services Victoria to focus on his role as Manager of the Prosthetics and Orthotics Department at Melbourne's St Vincent's Hospital. Darren also has a private practice in Melbourne, NeuroMuscular Orthotics, based in Mt Waverley, and he consults in Sydney on a monthly basis.*

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The first speaker was Darren Pereira, who has been involved with Polio Services Victoria for over 11 years.

Darren has been teaming with Ron Bell to demonstrate the SCKAFO (Stance Control Knee Ankle Foot Orthosis). Ron has been keen to demonstrate to post-polio groups as a way of acknowledging the assistance he received to fund his orthosis.

Stance control orthoses were released 20 years ago, and are used for post-polio, multiple sclerosis and late-onset muscular dystrophy. They provide knee flexion stability in stance while allowing knee flexion (the orthosis unlocks) during swing

There are 3 main types of stance control orthoses:

- Weight activated – knee joint locks when the client bears weight – this type is generally best for post-polio clients.
- Motion activated – ankle motion causes the knee to lock.
- Load response – stays locked at all times but allows a variable range.

Darren is Australia's expert for orthoses, which have advanced significantly with new technology. The SCKAFO, as used by Ron Bell, is like an external bionic leg. Watching Ron stand unaided for half an hour (which I can't do!) was impressive. When he removed the orthosis and attempted to stand and walk (explaining it was definitely against Darren's advice) it was scary. He couldn't stand let alone walk a step. The entire audience gasped in horror then relief when he reached the chair a metre away.

I had already had a consultation with Darren, and he had lent me the DVD of Ron showing him walking before and after the SCKAFO, but the reality was so much more dramatic.

Ron explained that it wasn't all magic. The orthosis requires retraining in walking and weight distribution to allow the knee to lock and unlock. The process is long and requires significant dedication. It is also expensive. In Victoria some of the cost (up to \$2,200) is covered by Polio Services Victoria, but around \$7,000 extra is still required. Ron was fortunate to have close ties with his local Lions Club who paid the entire cost for him. As he notes, however, it is a lot of money to invest in something which may not be successful for every individual.



Ron Bell demonstrating his weight-activated stance control KAFO to polio survivors in Wangaratta  
*Photos courtesy of Mary-ann Liethof, Polio Network Victoria*

For some time Darren has been consulting monthly in North Parramatta. He has now commenced practice with the physiotherapists at Advance Rehab Centre (ARC) at St Leonards. I had already traced Melissa McConaghy, the founder and director of this purpose-built rehabilitation gym and hydrotherapy centre, and commenced hydrotherapy. ARC has a comprehensive website <[www.archhealth.com.au](http://www.archhealth.com.au)> and can be contacted on 02 9906 7777 for information about Clinic times where you can consult Darren and the physiotherapists.

So, we're closer to my goal for a Post-Polio Clinic – all that's needed now is the funding and Rehabilitation Specialist as the basis for the necessary multi-disciplinary team.