

# Spring Connections

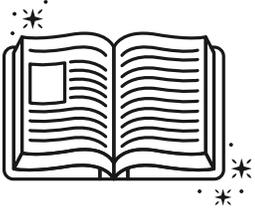


"Make your life a masterpiece; Imagine no limitations on what you can be, have or do" - Brian Tracy



**April 2020**

# What's New



- An update on the Coronavirus and how to keep yourself protected.
- A respiratory system overview after a spinal cord injury.



- A member spotlight on how he persevered at life after his traumatic spinal cord injury.



**United Spinal  
Association**

Research Updates

Announcements

MetroHealth's Annual  
SCI Forum

09|25|2020

Rammelkamp Atrium

## **Warmest Wishes on a New Adventure!**



After 17 years of devoted service at MetroHealth, Dr. Gregory Nemunaitis has decided to take his love and expertise of spinal cord injury medicine to the Cleveland Clinic. Dr. Nemunaitis, or Dr. Nemo if you will, did so much during his time at MetroHealth. He truly cared about his patients and we know that all of his patients will miss him greatly.

As a staff, we will miss his caring spirit, dedication, good humor, years of experience, and wit! Our warmest wishes go with him.

## **Please join us in welcoming Dr. James Wilson!**

Just a little over a year after completing his Spinal Cord Injury Fellowship at MetroHealth, Dr. James Wilson returned assuming the role of Director of Spinal Cord Injury! Dr. Wilson also directs the Spinal Cord Injury Fellowship and Medical Student Education.

It is with great honor to have Dr. Wilson, his hard work, and commitment as part of the SCI Model System team.





## **Please join us in welcoming Dr. Kimberly Anderson!**

Dr. Anderson is an experienced researcher. Her research has focused on transitional investigations and bridging gaps between basic science, clinical science, and the public community living with SCI. In addition to the several studies focused on obtaining the perspective of people living with SCI,

Dr. Anderson has expertise in SCI outcome measures. Dr. Anderson wears many hats here at MetroHealth, including, but not limited to, work with the FES Center, all the while still further developing her independent research efforts addressing issues important to people living with SCI with an emphasis on translational research to deploy treatments. And now she serves as a Project Director with the SCI Model System.

We are delighted to have Dr. Anderson, her dedication, and her passion as a part of the SCI Model System team.



# SCI Model Systems Research

## **Equity and Quality in Assistive Technology for Individuals with Spinal Cord Injury**

This study looks at the characteristics that impact the quality of assistive technology received and the health-related outcomes for individuals with spinal cord injury. If you decide you would like to take part in this research study, you will be asked to complete a series of questionnaires over a phone interview.

## **Residential Instability in Chronic SCI**

This study explores the effect of moving and changing addresses on the health and well-being of persons with SCI. Specifically, we want to assess: 1. who moves, why they move, and where they move; 2. if movers and non-movers differ in health and community participation outcomes; and 3. if movers and non-movers differ in healthcare access and utilization. You will be asked to complete a short survey which asks about your past and present addresses, neighborhood choice, how you feel about your neighborhood, and what types of resources and services are available where you live.

Participants receive a small compensation for each study completed

If you would like to take part, let us know! We would love to hear from you!!

Megan Hammond  
216-957-3562  
mhammond1@metrohealth.org



# **United Spinal Association**

## **Northeast Ohio Chapter**

The United Spinal Association Northeast Ohio Chapter has moved their meetings to a virtual platform until further notice in the wake of the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

The meetings will still occur on the 3rd Monday of each month, starting at 7 pm.

Announcements for these meeting will be posted on our Facebook page (see bottom of page) and through our email distribution. If you would like to sign up for our email list, please visit [unitedspinal.org](http://unitedspinal.org) and select the Cleveland/Chesterland/Northeast Ohio chapter to be affiliated with.

We are working with SCI Researchers through MetroHealth Medical Center and Case Western Reserve University to get emergency supplies together to our members, so now would be a great time to add your name to our email list. Supplies include masks, no touch thermometer, gloves, etc.

If you are unaware of our chapter, we provide education and recreation opportunities for life after a spinal cord injury. We oftentimes have tickets to PlayHouse Square, Cavs Games, and Blossom events that are free to members.

We also have a handcycle loan program where you can take and try out a handcycle at your leisure for 30 days at a time. If you would like to be involved, please sign up for our email list! Speaking of getting involved, we are looking for more members to add to our Board of Directors. We are looking for those with spinal cord injuries/disorders, community members, doctors, therapists, caregivers, or anyone else that has an interest in serving this community. Members of the board help plan the meetings, outings, and fundraisers.



If you are interested, or would like more information, again, please get ahold of current Chapter President, Megan Hammond at her email address:

[Hammond.megl@gmail.com](mailto:Hammond.megl@gmail.com).

Not able to make the meeting? That's okay! Visit us on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/unitedspinalneo/>

# Good Respiratory Hygiene after Spinal Cord Injury

James Wilson, DO  
Spinal Cord Injury Director  
MetroHealth Rehabilitation Institute of Ohio

Spinal cord injury (SCI) is damage to the thick bundle of nerves that travel down your neck and back. It sends and receives messages between the brain and the body. These messages can mostly be divided into 2 systems: the somatic nervous system and the autonomic nervous system. Somatic nerves serve most of the obvious jobs like muscles and sensation. Autonomic nerves work mostly behind the scenes to manage things like your blood pressure, body temperature, or sweating.

After SCI, your respiratory system could be affected a little or a lot. The first thing we ask is where in your back or neck was the SCI, since the higher your injury, the more likely you are to have trouble with breathing. This could be changes in somatic nerves (taking a deep breath or coughing up mucus) and/or autonomic nerves (thicker mucus or tighter, skinnier airways). These and other changes can lead to various problems:

- Pneumonia (infections)
- Aspiration (food or secretions accidentally getting in the lungs)
- Atelectasis (areas of the lung that don't inflate)
- Asthma (tight airways)
- Ventilatory failure (need for a machine to help you to breath)
- Mucus plugging (airways blocked with thick secretions)
- Effusion (fluid collecting around the lung)
- Tracheostomy (a tube placed in the front of your neck)



In addition, many people have a lower respiratory reserve. This means that people breathe fine enough when things are going well but may not do as well with something as mild as the common cold. Others may have damage to their lungs because of illness from the past (for example scarring from a pneumonia when they first got their injury).

All of this adds up to the unfortunate fact that most people with SCI are more likely to contract and be more severely impacted by an infection like COVID 19. That means that certainly, you should make every effort to prevent exposure to COVID 19 using social distancing and good hand hygiene. However, it is also important to optimize general respiratory health. Getting a more run-of-the-mill respiratory ailment can open the door for something more serious like COVID. Similarly, malfunctions in your natural defenses can make you more at risk. If you use an inhaler or nebulizer as needed, consider using it once or twice each day to prevent any problems.

Likewise, other respiratory aids (assisted cough, cough stimulators, coughalators, chest vest, chest PT, postural drainage, etc.) may need to be increased or done routinely to keep your airways clear. Getting good sleep, good nutrition, and good hydration can all help you support your immune system. Try to minimize stress and continue to exercise if possible. Consider ways to maintain good mental health while following social distancing. Carve out time to stay in good relationship with family, friends, and spiritual community by phone or video. You should prepare a contingency plan in case you do get ill and consider asking for more help if needed.

**The MetroHealth System is always here. If you have concerns (including a lack of food, medical supplies, or access to safe, effective health care), please reach out. Telehealth should be available throughout the system include telephone or video visits with primary care, spinal cord injury, pain, wound, physical therapy, and psychology providers. We are also working with Case Western Reserve University, United Spinal Association Northeast Ohio Chapter, and the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation to provide direct relief where possible. Don't suffer in silence; reach out.**

# Connect-In

SCI Program Initiative supported by our SCI Model System Grant.

All persons with a new traumatic SCI in the MetroHealth acute care hospital will have the opportunity to connect with a Peer Navigator.

Peer Navigators are persons living in the community with a SCI. The Navigators will be an important link to SCI information, community resources, information about SCI health care and health insurance.

It is our hope that this program will provide the links, information and skills patients with a new injuries need to successfully adapt and connect with their communities so that they can lead a fulfilling life.

If you or someone you know would like to be a Peer Navigator, please contact:



Megan Hammond  
216-957-3562  
[mhammond1@metrohealth.org](mailto:mhammond1@metrohealth.org)

# MetroHealth's Annual SCI Forum

09|25|2020

Rammelkamp of MH Main Campus

The 24th Annual MetroHealth SCI Forum, at the moment, will go on as planned. It's scheduled for **Friday, September 25, 2020** from 9 am to 2:30 pm. The "Roaring Twenties" theme will take place at MetroHealth Medical Center's (main campus) Rammelkamp Center, as it has in past years. Topics for sessions include Healthy Living, Dating, Relationships, & Sexuality" and "Experiencing Art." Mark your calendars and stay tuned for more details.

## **Curious about Clinical Studies specific to spinal cord injury?**



You can visit [scitrials.org](https://scitrials.org) and enter some details about your specific injury (level of injury, incomplete v. complete, and time post injury) to find all the clinical trials that you may qualify for. This website takes all the research studies from [clinicaltrials.org](https://clinicaltrials.org) and sorts through them to find the SCI specific trials and filters it to show you only the studies in which you may qualify for. Of course, additional screening via study staff will be required to determine eligibility.

# **How to continue to keep yourself protected until a vaccine or an effective treatment is available**

Kim Anderson, PhD

COVID-19 is a problem because it is a new virus that is highly infectious and the global population does not have immunity. It has become a devastating pandemic that will not end as quickly as it began. The recent strict restrictions involving business closures, stay at home orders, and social distancing have had a significant impact on reducing the number of people that could have gotten very sick due to COVID-19. However, these restrictions are not feasible to maintain much longer.

The reality is that the risk of infection will remain present until a vaccine is developed and widely available. Therefore, we have to do our best to control and prevent further infection until COVID-19 can be eliminated or eradicated.

As described in some of the other articles, people living with spinal cord injury are at a greater risk of experiencing more severe symptoms if they get infected. So the bottom line is that you want to do everything possible to prevent yourself from getting COVID-19. There are many things that are out of our control, but below are suggestions of things that we can control on an individual level.

## Continue to maintain:

- Good hand, respiratory, and cough hygiene
- Regularly clean your wheelchair (rims, locks, tires, arm rests, push handles, foot rests)
- Regularly clean surfaces you touch frequently (such as phone, backpack, keys, door knobs, assistive devices)
- Wear a mask when around anyone other than who you live with
- Have your caregivers wear a mask when around you
- Maintain social distancing as much as possible when out in public; stay away from people who are sick
- Limit unnecessary travel, particularly in crowded, closed settings such as airplanes, cruise ships, subways
- Stock up on supplies as they become available; this includes medical supplies, groceries, and cleaning supplies
- Try to find backup caregivers
- Talk to your healthcare provider about converting your prescriptions to mail-order, as you can usually get a larger supply via mail-order

**Overall, we will get through this difficult period and come out stronger on the other side.**



**CORONAVIRUS PREVENTION**



# Life After SCI:

## A Member Spotlight

Kevin Sullivan

In August 2017, after an accidental fall, I became a T9 complete paraplegic. However, I haven't let a wheelchair hold me back from fulfilling my dreams. After completing my inpatient and outpatient therapy, I immediately began learning how to drive again through MetroHealth's Driver Rehabilitation program. After receiving my new license, I worked with the State of Ohio's Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, who helped me get on Social Security's Ticket to Work program. By enrolling in the program, the cost for my car's hand controls and graduate school were fully covered by the state.

A year after my injury, I enrolled at Baldwin Wallace University in Berea, Ohio to study a Master's degree in Higher Education Administration. Through this program, I have held two year-long internships at BW: my first year was in the Learning Center and Disability Services for Students, and I am completing my second-year internship in Study Abroad. I have also interned in the Office of Education Abroad at Case Western Reserve University for the past year as well. As I prepare to graduate in a few short weeks, I have been applying for jobs at universities in Northeast Ohio. While my dream is to work in International Education, the current pandemic has shown me to be flexible with opportunities--and having a spinal cord injury has helped me understand that sometimes, you have to roll with the punches.

I have also been quite involved with the local community, and I love to travel! I volunteer with the Greater Cleveland YWCA as a small-group social justice facilitator. I am also the secretary and advocacy coordinator with the United Spinal Association Northeast Ohio Chapter and attended my first Roll On Capitol Hill in 2019. Since my injury, I have been to California four times, Washington, D.C. three times, Sarasota, Florida, and Asheville, North Carolina, where I rolled up a mountain!



# Check out some of these events hosted by local groups



Visit [ohiowheelchair.com](http://ohiowheelchair.com) for  
upcoming activities and events

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Adaptive Sports Connection  
6000 Harriott Drive  
Powell, Ohio 43065  
[info@adaptivesportsconnection.org](mailto:info@adaptivesportsconnection.org)

614.389.3921

For more information, visit their  
website:

[https://adaptivesportsconnectio  
n.org/sports-programs/](https://adaptivesportsconnection.org/sports-programs/)



# Mercy Health & Recreation Adaptive Sports & Recreation Program

Jennifer L. Pospisil

Mercy Adaptive Sports & Recreation Program Leader

3700 Kolbe Rd. Lorain, OH 44053

440.960.3423 or Jennifer.pospisil@mercy.com

Various adaptive events each day of the month - contact Jennifer Pospisil to find out more!



**LoCo 'Yaks** In Lorain has adaptive equipment and, when the season arrives, are ready to take you out on the water!

Check them out on their  
Facebook page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/locoyaks>





**Did you enjoy reading the Spring Newsletter? If so, please share with anyone you feel would be interested!**