Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability

RHN clinical PDOC Conference 2026

Wednesday 14 October 2026

Programme

09:00 **Registration and refreshments**

09.20 **Welcome and Introduction**
Paul Allen, *CEO, RHN*

09.25 **Welcome and Overview**
Dr Sophie Duport, *Associate Director of Research, RHN*

Conference Chair Morning Dr Sophie Duport, *Associate Director of Research, RHN*

09.30 **FOCUS update – how it is being used in practice with feedback from other centres trialling it**
Dr Sarah Crawford, *Consultant Clinical Neuropsychologist, RHN*
Rebecca Derham, *Senior Occupational Therapist, RHN*

09.55 **When Behaviour Limits Assessment: An Individualised Approach to Assessing Patients in a Prolonged Disorder of Consciousness**
Connie Lewis, *Occupational Therapist, RHN*
Liz Platt, *Physiotherapist, RHN*

10.10 **Observation to Interpretation of Pain in PDOC: The BPA, reflections from routine clinical practice**
Dr Stephen Ashford, *Associate Professor (Reader) and Consultant Physiotherapist Regional Hyper-acute Rehabilitation Unit, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust & King's College London, Department of Palliative Care, Policy and Rehabilitation*
Aideen Steed, *Principal Physiotherapist / Clinical Specialist, Regional Hyper-acute Rehabilitation Unit, Inpatient and Outreach Service, Northwick Park Hospital*

10:40 **Analgesic Prescription After Acquired Brain Injury: From PDOC to Emergence**
Dr Lloyd Bradley, *Consultant in Rehabilitation Medicine, RHN*

10.50 Break

11.10 **The sensory environment and leisure opportunities for patients in PDOC**
Brenda Berge, *Leisure and Family Services Manager, RHN*
Jennifer Connock, *Senior Occupational Therapist, RHN*
Safina Juma, *Occupational Therapist, RHN*

11.30 **Frenchay BIRU: Navigating the PDOC service within a rehabilitation setting**
Harriet Brooks, *Senior Occupational Therapist, Frenchay Brain Injury Rehab Unit*
Hannah Manson, *Specialist Occupational Therapist, Frenchay Brain Injury Rehab Unit*
Jessica Rubie-Todd, *Senior Occupational Therapist, Frenchay Brain Injury Rehab Unit*

11.50 **The effect of primary language on emergence from PDOC**
Dr Ejatu Jalloh, *Clinical and Research Fellow, RHN*

12.00 **Late emergence cases**
Dr Judith Allanson, *Consultant in Rehabilitation Medicine, RHN*

12.25 Lunch break and posters

Conference Chair Afternoon Dr Steven Luttrell, *Medical Director, RHN*

13.30 **A PDOC Pathway for Hyper-Acute Rehabilitation**
Claire Rae, *Advanced Speech & Language Therapist (Acute Trauma & Rehabilitation), Royal Stoke University Hospital*
Dr Melissa Sinha, *Senior Clinical Psychologist, Royal Stoke Major Trauma Centre*
Shona Thompson, *Advanced Physiotherapist, Royal Stoke Major Trauma Centre*

14.00 **The Promise of Rehabilitation: combining research with practice to understand family expectations of recovery in severe brain injury**
Jessica Blake, *Occupational Therapist and Research Fellow, NIHR ARC East of England*

14.15 **Phase III PDOC monitoring - translating RCP guidelines into clinical practice**
Anisa Cassim, *Clinical Specialist Occupational Therapist, RHN*
Erin Probert, *Clinical Lead Speech and Language Therapist, RHN*

14.45 Break

15.05 **Sensory swallow assessment in prolongued disorders of consciousness and complex neurodisability**
Sophie Brown, *Speech and Language Therapist, Centre for Neuro Rehabilitation, Cardiff and Vale UHB*

15.15 **A different perspective of PDOC treatment planning**
Pastor Geoff Coyne, *Lead Chaplain, RHN*

15.30 **Developing a pathway for patients with prolonged disorders of consciousness in the acute NHS setting: a QIP**
Rosie Hawker, *Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist in Neurosciences and Neuro Trauma, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham*
Melanie Shaw, *Speech and Language Therapist – Team Lead Specialist Rehab Service, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham*

15:40 **The Court of Protection and PDOC – a snapshot of Clinicians' experiences**
Dr Andrew Hanrahan, *Consultant, RHN*

16:10 **Intelligent object use and emergence from PDOC: OT Reflections and changing practice**
Alison Knight and Petra Zeiser-Finn, *Presenting on behalf of OT UK PDOC CEN (Clinical Experts Network)*

16:25 **Closing comments**
Dr Sophie Duport, *Associate Director of Research, RHN*

16.30 Conference close

A bit about our speakers

Dr Judith Allanson
Consultant in Rehabilitation Medicine, RHN

Before moving to the RHN she spent 11 years at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, where she established an evidence-based Community Head Injury Service as part of a five-year Eveyln Trust Funded Neuro-Rehabilitation project and joined the Cambridge group for Research on Impaired Consciousness, becoming PI in 2018. This work enabled development of a rapid access to acute rehab (RAAR) ward within the Major trauma centre at Addenbrookes as well as further study of recovery mechanisms after both very severe injury (prolonged Disorders of Consciousness, PDOC) and after discharge into the community. Since 2010 Judith has been part of an international research collaboration led by Prof Niko Schiff (New York) studying PDOC which has recently published a large multi centre study reporting cognitive motor dissociation (covert command following) in patients in PDOC using fMRI and EEG (Bodien, Allanson et al, NEJM Aug 2024).

Judith has established and chaired several Special interest groups, (SIGs), within the BSPRM, including the UK PDOC SIG since set up in 2014) and has contributed to a number of research papers and other publications including National Guidelines on PDOC, Trauma Rehabilitation and Community Rehabilitation.

She continues to work with the Cambridge Coma and Consciousness Research group as a Visitor in the University Department of Anaesthetics. She continues to work clinically on a part time basis, offering assessments and second opinions for people with very severe brain injury, and is a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and a member of the ABN, BNPA, IBIA PDOC SIG and BSPRM. Judith is a trustee of Headway Cambridge and Peterborough, and has offered clinical support to the Brain Injury is BIG charity.

Dr Stephen Ashford
Associate Professor (Reader) and Consultant Physiotherapist
Regional Hyper-acute Rehabilitation Unit, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust & King's College London, Department of Palliative Care, Policy and Rehabilitation, London, UK

Stephen has incorporated clinical practice with research and implementation science to develop research outputs which are clinically relevant and applied to people following stroke and acquired brain injury. He delivers the regional specialised outreach service for North West London and surrounding counties, including the management of spasticity. He has developed with local, national and international colleagues a programme of research, which builds strongly on his clinical expertise in management of spasticity and the physical aspects of neurological rehabilitation. The programme has incorporated development of outcome evaluation using Goal Attainment Scaling in conjunction with measures such as the Arm and Leg Activity measures, with robust psychometric testing. Stephen edited the national guidelines on spasticity management published in 2018 by the Royal College of Physicians, UK.

Stephen was awarded a Fellowship of the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists In Neurorehabilitation, UK in 2016 and of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, UK in 2018. He became Senior Clinical Lecturer and Hon. Associate Professor (University College London) in June 2019 at the Centre for Nursing, Midwifery and Allied health led Research, University College London Hospitals. He is now Hon. Associate Professor (King's College London) and Consultant physiotherapist (London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust) and clinical research lead for Nurses Midwives and Allied Health Professionals across the organisation.

Stephen is currently working on research projects in arm and leg spasticity, rehabilitation goal setting and treatment planning for people with spasticity, clinician (physiotherapy, medical and other MDT members) practice development for spasticity management and the wider application of goal setting

and measurement tools in rehabilitation (including in palliative care). He currently holds an NIHR Senior Clinical Practitioner Researcher Award.

Jessica Blake
NIHR ARC East of England Research Fellow

Jessica Blake is an Occupational Therapist and NIHR ARC East of England Research Fellow. She specialises in the rehabilitation of people with complex needs following brain injury in subacute care. Jessica has led and published several research projects exploring family expectations of recovery and how these are addressed in healthcare settings. Her work aims to strengthen relationships between healthcare professionals and families, as this is likely to improve rehabilitation experiences and outcomes.

Brenda Berge
Leisure and Family Services Manager, RHN

Brenda is the Leisure and Family Services Manager at RHN, where she leads programs and initiatives that strengthen individuals, families, and communities through inclusive, person-centred services. With extensive experience in leisure, recreation, and family support, Brenda is passionate about creating opportunities that enhance quality of life, promote meaningful engagement, and foster belonging for people of all ages and abilities.

Throughout her career, Brenda has worked collaboratively with community partners, service providers, and families to develop innovative programs that respond to evolving community needs. Her leadership is grounded in a commitment to accessibility, collaboration, and continuous improvement, ensuring that services are responsive, impactful, and sustainable.

Dr Lloyd Bradley
Consultant in Rehabilitation Medicine, RHN

Dr Lloyd Bradley is a consultant in rehabilitation medicine. He has worked at the RHN for just over a year now having previously worked in specialist neurorehabilitation in Sussex. He has a PhD in molecular biology and genetics from the University of London and underwent medical training in London and the East of England. He has previously been on NICE guideline committees for the management of multiple sclerosis and adult cerebral palsy and worked with NCEPOD in developing evaluations of transitional care from paediatric to adult services. Dr Bradley's current research interests include looking at prescribing practices in individuals with acquired brain injury, factors impacting on outcomes of specialist rehabilitation and staff experiences in long term care working with patients with disorders of consciousness.

Harriet Brooks
Senior Occupational Therapist, Frenchay Brain Injury Rehab Unit
Hannah Manson
Specialist Occupational Therapist, Frenchay Brain Injury Rehab Unit
Jessica Rubie-Todd
Senior Occupational Therapist, Frenchay Brain Injury Rehab Unit

Harriet, Hannah and Jess have a combined 29 years' experience working at Frenchay Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit (BIRU). They share a specialist interest in PDOC and are all trained PDOC assessors. As members of the PDOC working party within the Level One Service at Frenchay BIRU, they contribute to the ongoing development and delivery of specialist PDOC assessment, rehabilitation and best interest decision making.

Sophie Brown
Speech and Language Therapist, Centre for Neuro Rehabilitation, Cardiff and Vale UHB

Sophie Brown is the Clinical Lead Speech and Language Therapist for the Brain Injury pathway at Cardiff and Vale UHB. She has worked across a number of SLT services in Wales but has specialised in Neurorehabilitation for the past 11 years, which includes the development of the PDOC pathway across Wales.

Pastor Geoff Coyne
Lead Chaplain, RHN

Geoff Coyne is Lead Chaplain at the RHN where he has served for nearly 25 years. He provides pastoral support to patients, families and staff of all faiths and cultures. Whilst he leads the hospital's Christian ministry, he also makes sure that people from other other faiths get their faith ministers and faith support.

Geoff is passionate about compassionate care and supporting people through life's most challenging circumstances.

Dr Sarah Crawford
Consultant Clinical Neuropsychologist, RHN

Dr Sarah Crawford is a Consultant Clinical Neuropsychologist at the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability in Putney. She is the professional lead for Clinical Psychology within the Brain Injury Service, an NHS England funded Level 1 neuro-rehabilitation service for patients with complex neuro-disability. Dr Crawford has a particular interest in supporting families, and chaired the RHN's steering group for improving services for our patients' and residents' families and friends.

She has previously worked in the NHS, providing specialist outpatient neuropsychological assessments. She has also worked as a Clinical Psychologist within other specialist neuro-rehabilitation settings, including a transitional rehabilitation service and a unit for patients with severe challenging behaviour secondary to brain injury.

Dr Crawford has a BA degree in Experimental Psychology from the University of Oxford, a PhD in Psychology from University College London, and a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Kings College London. She has completed post-doctoral training in clinical neuropsychology and is listed on the British Psychological Society's Specialist Register of Clinical Neuropsychologists.

Rosie Hawker MSc
Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist in Neurosciences and Neuro Trauma, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham
Melanie Shaw
Speech and Language Therapist – Team Lead Specialist Rehab Service, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham

Rosie and Mel established a multi-professional working group of therapists with a specialist interest in the PDOC patient group. They both have over 10 years' experience working with patients in the acute stages of disorders of consciousness at a Major Trauma Centre in Birmingham.

Dr Ejatu Jalloh
Clinical and Research Fellow, RHN

Dr Ejatu Jalloh is a Clinical and Research Fellow at the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability (RHN), working within the Brain Injury Service, including with patients in PDOC, and the Neurobehavioural Service. Her clinical and research work focuses on neurorehabilitation, with a particular interest in factors that influence patient outcomes and PDOC assessment. Her current research explores the effect of primary language on functional outcomes and emergence from PDOC, with the aim of improving equitable assessment and informing clinical decision-making.

Alison Knight
Principal Occupational Therapist, Northwick Park Hospital

Principal Occupational Therapist at the Regional Hyper-Acute Rehabilitation Unit (RHRU) with over 25 years of clinical experience in neurorehabilitation and complex disability management. Since 2012, she has specialised in the assessment and management of patients with Prolonged Disorders of Consciousness (PDOC) and complex disabilities. Alison leads the Unit's PDOC Working Party and deliver both internal and external national training on PDOC assessment and complex disability management. In addition, she contribute to the RHRU Outreach Service, providing specialist expertise and support across this service.

Connie Lewis
Occupational Therapist, RHN

Connie Lewis is an Occupational Therapist who graduated from Canterbury Christ Church University over five years ago. She has worked at the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability (RHN) for over two years, gaining valuable experience across both the Behavioural Unit and Brain Injury Service.

Connie currently works within a Level One Rehabilitation Unit, where she continues to develop her clinical expertise, with a particular focus on assessments and management approaches for individuals with Prolonged Disorders of Consciousness (PDOC).

Liz Platt
Physiotherapist, RHN

Liz is a Physiotherapist at the RHN where she has worked for the past seven months as part of a two-year rotational contract. She is currently based on a Level One Brain Injury Unit, working with individuals with Prolonged Disorders of Consciousness (PDOC) and those undergoing neurological rehabilitation.

Prior to joining the RHN, Liz worked within the Rapid Access Rehabilitation service at King’s College Hospital and completed general rotational placements at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals. She has a strong interest in neurological physiotherapy and is committed to developing her clinical skills, knowledge and experience within this specialist patient population.

Erin Probert
Clinical Lead Speech and Language Therapist, RHN

Erin has been Clinical Lead Speech & Language Therapist for the Continuing Care service at RHN since 2021, however has been at RHN since 2013. Erin has a strong interest in complex mental capacity assessments and best interests decision making, supporting patient autonomy and advocacy, future care planning for people with progressive neurological disorders, and neuro-palliative care.

Erin is passionate about optimising quality of life for people with severe brain injuries. Some of her time is currently seconded into the role of 'CANH in PDOC Lead', where she is supporting the clinical

teams with best interests decision making about Clinically Assisted Nutrition and Hydration for patients in PDOC at RHN.

Claire Rae
Advanced Speech & Language Therapist (Acute Trauma & Rehabilitation), Royal Stoke University Hospital

Claire Rae is an Advanced Speech and Language Therapist, leading the SLT team on the Hyper Acute Rehabilitation Unit embedded within the Royal Stoke Major Trauma Centre. Claire has been working in PDOC in acute and community settings for over 10 years, and specialises in the acute stages of rehabilitation following brain injury.

Dr Melissa Sinha
Senior Clinical Psychologist, Royal Stoke Major Trauma Centre

Dr Melissa Sinha is a Senior Clinical Psychologist, working on the Hyper Acute Rehabilitation Unit embedded within the Royal Stoke Major Trauma Centre. Melissa has been working in PDoC in acute settings for over 4 years and specialises in the acute stages of rehabilitation following acquired brain injury.

Aideen Steed
Principal Physiotherapist / Clinical Specialist, Regional Hyper-acute Rehabilitation Unit, Inpatient and Outreach Service, Northwick Park Hospital

Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist and Professional Lead for Physiotherapy within the Regional Hyper-Acute Rehabilitation Unit at London Northwest University Healthcare NHS Trust. She also works within the Trust's Outreach Service, specialising in spasticity management and the rehabilitation of individuals with complex physical disabilities.

Aideen holds an MSc in Neurorehabilitation and combines advanced clinical practice with a strong commitment to research, service development, and education. Her clinical and research interests focus on the assessment and management of spasticity, contracture prevention and treatment, and pain assessment in individuals with complex neurological disability. She has contributed to the evidence base in these fields through peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations and collaborative research projects. Her current research activities include upper and lower limb spasticity rehabilitation, goal setting and outcome measurement within community-based specialist services. Alongside her clinical and academic work, Aideen is actively involved in professional education and workforce development. She delivers national teaching across the UK on rehabilitation outcome measures, splinting and orthotic management. Internationally, she has contributed to delivering training programmes in Myanmar, India, and Nepal, supporting the development of clinical practice and rehabilitation capacity in low-resource settings. Aideen also serves as a Trustee of the Injured Players Foundation, the Rugby Football Union's charitable organisation supporting individuals who sustain catastrophic spinal cord or traumatic brain injuries while playing rugby.

Through her clinical leadership, research, teaching, and voluntary work, she is committed to advancing neurorehabilitation and improving outcomes for people living with complex neurological conditions.

Shona Thompson
Advanced Physiotherapist, Royal Stoke Major Trauma Centre

Shona Thompson is an Advanced Physiotherapist, leading the Physiotherapy team on the Hyper Acute Rehabilitation Unit embedded within the Royal Stoke Major Trauma Centre. Shona has been

working in PDOC in acute setting alongside the MDT for over 10 years, and specialises in the acute stages of rehabilitation following brain injury and tracheostomy weaning within this patient group.