

The ability in disability

Deborah Eastwood



Deborah Eastwood is a Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon in London and Vice President of the BOA. She believes that accepting diversity is the key to success.

We are in this profession of ours to make a difference, to make people better, to allow the person to be comfortable, functional and able to participate fully in what life has to offer. Our 'standard' joint replacement procedures virtually guarantee an enhanced quality of life for our patients with severe osteoarthritis and a THR remains one of the most satisfying operations I have ever done.

Along the line, however, I chose paediatric orthopaedics (or rather it chose me) because of the never-ending amazing processes of growth and development which have taught me so much about how we see ability and how we define progress. For all children, physical activity as much as physiotherapy is often key to improving symptoms and function which then encourages kids to join in.

The London 2012 Paralympics, in my opinion, provided a sea-change moment where it became ok to ask questions – when children were heard to say “why can't I have a football with bells in it?” or “those clip on legs look cool” and “I

wish I could run as fast as she can”. The 'Last Leg' television programme also encouraged an acceptance of people with abilities that differed from ours.

Two years later came the first Invictus games – another turning point – which highlighted the achievements of those who's level of ability had changed, often overnight. The games recognised the length of the road to recovery and the difficulty in reaching a point of acceptance of the new version of yourself. These athletes with an 'acute' change in function provided a contrast to those who have grown up with a need to adapt to their differing ability and these two sides of the coin are highlighted in the articles by John and Virginie.

Life is rarely simple and should not be lonely so the importance of a supportive team must never be underestimated be it family, therapists, friends, the medical team or the prosthetists. Many people with a physical disability can be helped with the nuanced use of orthotics be it an insole or a prosthetic limb and Louise's article highlights where some of the advances in design are taking place.



Matthew and Yoshi - Brothers in Arms.

Six years ago, Matthew's wheelchair provided a mobile walker for his brother Yoshi who was learning to walk – innovation and thinking laterally should be integral to how we deal with the difficulties our patients face but also we must continue to listen and learn from them – what works for one may not be right for the other.

This year, Matthew is on the front cover of this edition of our journal but much more importantly, to him, he is on the elite track for the next Paralympics.

Success, however, is not defined by the Paralympics, the Invictus games or the Olympics – it is defined by those we see and treat being able to take part – in a fun run, a walk on uneven ground, or having easy access to a pool and feeling included in life.

We must continue to support and advocate for our patients thinking laterally whenever that is necessary. ■