

Celebrating our 15,000th wheelchair!

September saw a very special day at our Yorkshire depot – a container bound for Zimbabwe was loaded with our 15,000th wheelchair.

The recipient is the Rotary Club of Harare Dawn in Zimbabwe and is the ninth container they have received since 2016. Wheelchairs probably have the highest profile of the 50 categories of equipment we supply and loading the 15,000th wheelchair was something to celebrate.

This container was PhysioNet's 108th to 28 countries since 2009 and we will have sent a total of nearly 60,000 items of equipment to help people with disabilities overseas. The new value of these items in UK would exceed £10 million and some 600 tonnes of valuable equipment will have been kept out of the scrap yard.



In fact three special gold wrapped wheelchairs were loaded, one for a child and two for adults (one self-propelled chair and one attendant push type). We hope that when the container is unloaded in Harare, there will be plenty of publicity and that the three wheelchairs will be given



For the loading, at Gelsthorpe Farm, PhysioNet volunteers were joined by Harrogate and Knaresborough MP Andrew Jones, The Mayor of Boroughbridge Cllr Pat Taylor and Rotary District Governor Stephen Ellis.

to deserving recipients. In particular we hope to receive the “backstory” of how these individuals came to need the wheelchairs and of the impact the equipment will have on their quality of life.

This number of wheelchairs if placed in a straight line would stretch from Leeds to Bradford or if placed side-by-side would cover 15 football pitches!



Mark and Chris Lovett of PhysioNet's "Wheelchair Repair Shop" cut the celebratory cake.

Rwanda is not a Pushover

The last Newsletter described the need to remove all plastic wrapping and provide unusually detailed paperwork for the consignment, loaded on 13th March 2021 for the ASFA Physiotherapy Centre shipment to Rwanda.

The container duly arrived in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) on 9 April but due to a combination of mishaps including emails going to the wrong person who didn't read English and the Rwandan agent's recommendation that goods should clear customs on arrival in Dar Es Salaam as the gateway to the East Africa Community (EAC), the container wasn't released until 12th May! Unfortunately, demurrage costs were incurred as the correct EAC paperwork couldn't be produced and the team eventually decided to clear the container in Kigali as per the original plan. It was quite a headache and many lessons were learned!

On arrival in Rwanda, the import visa required even more paperwork from PhysioNet, as the supplier of the goods as well as the National Council of Persons with Disabilities. All satisfied, the customs officials finally let the ASFA staff unload the container and every single item in every single box was checked against the manifest. Thankfully, the 40ft HC container eventually cleared in its entirety and the equipment was loaded onto a special truck that was permitted to enter the customs zone in Kigali and started the 118 miles (190km) drive to ASFA Physio in Muganza village, Nyaruguru District.

Despite the logistical hiccups, the value of the equipment at more than £100k will dramatically improve the quality of care the staff can provide at ASFA Physio and the quality of life for people living with disabilities in Rwanda. So, while a few grey hairs sprouted on both sides, all's well that ends well and everyone at ASFA Physio is absolutely delighted.



A young Rwandan fellow making the most of PhysioNet equipment delivered earlier this year



PhysioNet SW does its bit

On Saturday 29th May PhysioNet South West loaded a container bound for Empangeni, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The container was loaded in Cheriton Bishop, Devon during one of the hottest days of the year. The loading coincided with both school's half term and the Bank Holiday weekend giving rise to acute traffic problems and after some anxious waiting the container arrived over two hours late. However, a great turnout of volunteers, all of whom patiently waited for the container to arrive, made reasonably light work of loading 723 pcs of recycled mobility equipment. Well done folks.

Meet our new Patron, Col. Mark Cook OBE

I first met Peter and Valerie Thompson in 1999 when they started supporting Hope and Homes for Children, the charity which my wife and I founded 5 years earlier.

Very quickly Peter identified the need for special equipment for many of the children we were rescuing from orphanages where they had been 'imprisoned', sometimes in their cots, for many years. To source such items and then export them abroad was beyond the core mission and ability of our charity. So, we were delighted when Peter decided to start his own charity with the very specific mission to do this.

I have been amazed by the growth of PhysioNet and I am in awe of all they have achieved over the years. There are countless thousands of people, including many of 'our' children, whose lives have been transformed by the special aids that PhysioNet has given them.

What an amazing gift and why I feel honoured to have been invited to be a Patron of Physionet.



Destination Romania



It's great to see our loads received safe and sound. In the summer our Romania bound container navigated more complex post-Brexit customs regulations successfully and was unloaded by the team in Alba Iulia (phew!).



International & Academic Scrutiny

In 2016 Liana Nagy, a Romanian OT working in West Yorkshire, contacted PhysioNet with a view to supplying therapy equipment to the Maria-Beatrice Centre in Transylvania. This initial contact led to a most successful partnership, with six HGV loads of equipment and follow up training visits by Heather Angilley and her team. The Maria-Beatrice Centre now has the best facilities, equipment and staff of any similar center in Romania.

Fast forward to 2021 and Liana having gained a PhD from Bradford University, is now a Senior OT Lecturer, in the Department of Sport and Health Science at Oxford Brookes University. We suggested that an in-depth review of PhysioNet's 16 year record of re-cycling therapy equipment from UK to low and medium income countries (LMIC) might constitute a good research project.

The team charged with this task, three MSc students plus their tutor Liana started the project with a site visit to Yorkshire in early July. The students met with their Technical Supervisor Heather Angelley and Peter Thompson responsible for providing information on the countries/ equipment supplied, as well as all aspects of the charity's business.

By careful selection, Liana has assembled an international team to carry out the project all of whom expect to graduate with MSc degrees in September 2022.

Shipments

Apr – Sept

The following shipments were made between April and the end of September 2021. Covid-19 restrictions caused some problems, but these were minor in comparison to the delays in shipping/ haulage and a steep increase in shipping costs. Over the 6 month period a total of 3,510 items including 440 wheelchairs were loaded into four 40 ft containers and one HGV.



South Africa. This consignment was loaded from Exeter on 29th May for the Rotary Club of Empangeni in KZN with funding from the Wheelchair Foundation. The container arrived safely and the equipment has been distribute via seven participating clubs.



Fiji. The 19th consignment to the Spinal Injuries Association (SIA) in Suva, was finally loaded on 5th June. This after two previous loadings had to be cancelled at short notice due to a lack of hauliers. The load contained 204 large boxes/ suitcases of linen, blankets and other hurricane relief items and the shipping costs were met from NZ hurricane relief funds. The consignment has arrived safely, but the usual high profile hand-over was cancelled due to Covid restrictions.



South Africa The consignment was loaded on 19th June for the Gately Rotary Club in East London. Funding to Coega port came from the Wheelchair Foundation and we have received good feedback.



Romania. The sixth consignment to the Maria-Beatrice Centre in Alba Iulia, but the first since Brexit. Much more red-tape than a year ago at this end, but manageable thanks to our new Forwarding Agent. Customs clearance in Romania post-Brexit, has been devolved to County-level and getting the correct approvals resulted in two cancelled loadings before we finally got the 50 ft trailer loaded and away.



Zimbabwe The consignment was loaded on 11th September for the Rotary Club of Harare Dawn and will be the ninth container they have received since 2016. As before, funding came from the Oak Foundation and we celebrated loading the 15,000 wheelchair as reported on the front page.

Third party shipments – Only three collections, totalling 57 wheelchairs for Yemen and northern Iraq.



The team: Roli Jemerigbe Atotuomah (Nigeria), Katie Pratt (USA), Lauren Somerville (Scotland), Dr Liana Nagy (Tutor) and Heather Angilley

Kind words from a good friend of PhysioNet

Joshco Wakaniyasi, who is quadriplegic, founded the Spinal Injuries Association (SIA) in Fiji in 2008. Our 2nd ever shipment arrived in Fiji in January 2010 and both organisations have helped each other grow considerably over the years.



Joshco is now with the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) an umbrella organisation for a number of disabled persons organisations throughout the Pacific.

Joshco had the following to say on hearing that we had shipped our 15,000th wheelchair.



Disabled man makes the most of our equipment

Tom Soper is an accountant from Harare, Zimbabwe. Following a road traffic accident Tom was hospitalised for over a year and became quadriplegic. But this does not hold Tom back and he now works to support others with disability and with the help of Harare Rotarians has found good homes for PhysioNet supplied wheelchairs. Good man Tom!



Dear Mr. Thompson,

Congratulations, to you Sir and PhysioNet UK on this milestone.

Since the first equipment left the UK to support persons with disabilities around the world about 12 years ago, PhysioNet started to assist and enable some of the world's most vulnerable. Without the support and assistance provided by PhysioNet imagine the challenges and hardships these beneficiaries face to acquire an appropriate device.

Not only have I been privileged and honoured to be part of these activities for Fiji, but I am also most humble and sincerely grateful as a beneficiary of this support. Fiji is amongst the largest recipient of PhysioNet products and persons with disabilities and their representative organizations are heavily reliant on PhysioNet support.

The measure of equipment (wheelchairs) one after another or side by side stretchers a visible and respectable distance. Imagine if the beneficiaries of PhysioNet support held hands and stood side by side. Wouldn't that be a sight, not only the distance nor the number but also the different ethnicity, ages, colour, size, and the list goes on. As an advocate for inclusion, I applaud and acknowledge PhysioNet.

Again, congratulations and thank you for your wisdom, generosity, and commitment to persons living with disabilities globally.

May God continue to Bless you and the PhysioNet family.

Vinaka and Kind Regards

Joshco Wakaniyasi | Manager Inclusive Development

Thank you NorDDis

NorDDis is a charity serving the needs of disabled people living in North Dorset, South East Somerset and South West Wiltshire. We are grateful for their kind donation of equipment this year, and indeed their kind words:

"We here at Norddis are very proud to be a very small cog in a very large wheel, helping you to reach those countries and the people who need aid and help. Thank you for accepting us in your 'loop' of donators who are here to help where we can. We are a small one off charity but with a Big Heart".

DONATE or GET INVOLVED

Individual donations are very important to us. Our HSBC bank details are: **Sort code: 40-23-12. Account no: 72496194.** Alternatively donate via **Now Donate** using the link on our website. If you would like to get involved email Peter Thompson at peter.thompson@physionet.org.uk.

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