



NEWSLETTER

EDITION 8

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER
2025

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

1. SASCA Review 2025
2. ISCoS 2025
3. Gauteng SCI Workgroup
4. Research Report
5. International Rehabilitation Forum (IRF)
6. Food for thought
 - Celebrating Resilience: A Look at Matric Results and the Achievement of Meerhof School
 - Spinal Cord Injuries and the Empowering Role of Sports
7. Info corner:
 - QASA memberships
 - Adaptive Sports Fund
8. Connect With Us



IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER:

1. **International Day of Persons with Disabilities:** 03 December 2025
2. **Wings For Life:** 10 May 2026
3. **ISCOS 2026:** 7–10 October 2026 at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre. Visit www.iscosmeetings.org for more info and registration.
4. **Gauteng SCI Workgroup Training**
 - a. Basic Course: 2026 dates TBC
 - b. Intermediate Course: 2026 dates TBC
5. **SCI Injury Day:** Observed 5 September annually

SASCA 2025 REPORT

Written by Melanie Harding

SASCA Congress 2025 – A Resounding Success in Cape Town

The South African Spinal Cord Association (SASCA) hosted its highly anticipated 2025 Congress from **22–24 May 2025** at Century City, Cape Town. What an incredible few days of learning, networking, and collaboration it proved to be!

We were honoured to welcome an outstanding line-up of invited speakers:

- **Dr Brian Kwon** (ICORD, Vancouver, Canada)
- **Mr Briann Mkiva** (Psychologist, South Africa)
- **Dr Haleluya Moshi** (Doctor of Physiotherapy, Tanzania)
- And as a special highlight, **Dr Andrew Haig** (Prof Andrew Haig, Emeritus Professor at University of Michigan,



President of International Rehabilitation Forum, USA).

Once again, SASCA partnered with the **South African Spine Society**, hosting joint sessions that enriched the scientific programme and fostered interdisciplinary dialogue.



Congress Themes and Highlights

The sessions covered a wide spectrum of cutting-edge and relevant topics, including:

- Quality of life post-spinal cord injury (SCI)
- Peer support and patient outcomes
- Community reintegration and sexuality after SCI
- Breaking barriers in rehabilitation medicine in Africa
- Translational research and contemporary approaches to early SCI management
- The challenges faced in South Africa
- Neurochemical biomarkers of acute SCI
- Communication with patients following SCI

These discussions not only advanced knowledge but also highlighted future directions for research and clinical practice.

Collaboration and Networking

True to the spirit of SASCA, the congress emphasised collaboration and community. Attendees had the privilege of engaging directly with consumers, as well as representatives from the **Players Fund** and the **QuadPara Association of South Africa (QASA)**. Networking opportunities were both fruitful and empowering, reinforcing the collective mission of improving outcomes for those living with SCI.



Social and Sponsors

The **Gala Dinner** took the vibrant form of a street market, offering delegates a chance to unwind, connect informally, and enjoy excellent food and entertainment.

We extend heartfelt thanks to our generous sponsors — **Abbvie, Intecare, Nurture, Solventum, Netcare, Biokinetics SA, Baxter, Coloplast, Duzane, RH&P Rehab, and Life**



Rehabilitation — whose support made this congress possible.

Visit our website www.sasca.org.za for more information, or to sign up to become a member.

Recognising Excellence

Awards were proudly presented for:

- **Best Poster:** Nadine Botha and Marelise de Wet
- **Best Presentation:** Leandré Stroebel

Congratulations to the winners, who exemplify the spirit of innovation and dedication within our community.

Closing Thanks

A sincere vote of thanks goes to our presenters, invited guests, attendees, and especially the **SASCA Committee** for their hard work and enthusiasm in making the 2025 Congress such a success.

We look forward to building on this momentum and welcoming you to the **next SASCA Congress in 2027!**

SASCA Executive Committee Members:

- Kholofelo Mashola: *Chair*
- Virginia Wilson: *Vice Chair Medical*
- Candice Poxon: *Vice Chair Therapy*
- Shirley Eberlein: *Treasurer*
- Alicia Swart: *Secretary*
- Leandre Stroebel: *Membership Secretary*

SASCA Co-Opted Members:

- Michael Alves: *Education*
- Anton Engelbrecht: *QASA*
- Jessica Morris: *Marketing and Newsletter*
- Aneesa Khan
- Anrie Carstens
- Belinda Le Roux

ISCOS 2025

Written by Melanie Harding

ISCOS 2025 was held from the 9-11th October 2025 in Gothenburg, Sweden. There was a special pre congress workshop for Physio's and Occupational therapists. Candice Smith, Melanie Harding and Kholofelo Mashola all presented at the workshop. Meetings were also set up with the affiliated societies to ensure we keep ourselves and SASCA up to date with the forefront of research in SCI.

Watch our next newsletter for feedback from the congress!

A big CONGRATULATIONS to Madelein Greyling, who was announced the winner of the SASCA SCI Day poster competition! Not only did Madelein win the SASCA competition for SCI Day 2025, but her poster was amongst the top 5 posters at ISCoS this year!

A big thank you to all who submitted posters and congratulations again to Madelein!





GAUTENG SCI WORKGROUP

Written by Jessica Morris

*Adapted from original article written by Fiona
Breytenbach*

The Gauteng SCI Workgroup (est. 2020), a workgroup consisting of 20 members from 9 healthcare professions (HCP) from public and private sectors has continued with their holistic trainings for HCP's throughout the year. The need for improved SCI care is globally recognised, and The World Health Organization (WHO) has driven an initiative called Rehabilitation 2030, which aims to strengthen rehabilitation services in all levels of care to achieve universal health coverage.

Both the Basic (theory-based) SCI course as well as the Intermediate (practical and theory) courses have been run again this year.

The Basic Course was run in June 2025, and the Intermediate Course in September 2025. Roughly 145 participants attended the Basic course, and 19 (open to only 20 participants given the practical hands-on teaching style) attended the Intermediate course. To date, the Gauteng SCI Workgroup have *trained over 500 healthcare workers* in the basic management of people with SCI, and nearly *40 rehabilitation professionals* in intermediate clinical skills.



Each year shows continued growth not only in the number of attendees at these courses, but

also the provinces which we are able to train in. In 2025, the Gauteng SCI Workgroup opened up collaboration to representatives in Western Cape, Mpumalanga and Kwa-Zulu Natal to help reach even bigger audiences. The Mpumalanga Workgroup has now also started with a Basic training program, and successfully held their first workshop in June 2025.

After each course, an evaluation is completed by all attendees. One of the most frequent suggestions made is to provide more practical, hands-on training skills which the workgroup strives to achieve in its intermediate courses in years to come.



The training portfolio of this workgroup, comprising of Mrs Fiona Breytenbach, Prof Pradeep Kumar, Dr Kholofelo Mashola, Mrs Jessica Povall (Morris), and Ms Lauren Soll continue to work hard in evolving and developing these training courses, and we look forward to the courses awaiting us in 2026 as well as the eager course participants looking to improve their holistic management of SCI patients across South Africa.

Should you wish to become involved in the Gauteng SCI Workgroup, please contact
gp.sciworkgroup@gmail.com

RESEARCH REPORT

Epidemiology of spinal cord injuries in three selected counties in Kenya

by George M. Muli, Veronica Ntsiea, Natalie Benjamin-Damons and Nassib Tawa



Published Online: 31 Jan 2025

https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-sajp_v81_n1_a2097

Background: Spinal cord injury (SCI) presents a significant health challenge, characterised by damage to the spinal cord resulting from trauma, inflammation, tumours or other aetiologies. This injury often leads to a range of debilitating consequences, including loss of motor function, sensation, sphincter control and autonomic nerve function below the site of injury, as well as challenges with self-care and performance of instrumental activities of daily living (ADLs). **Objectives:** This study aimed to determine the prevalence, risk factors and characteristics of SCI among adult patients in three selected counties in Kenya. **Method:** A population of 213 patients from three counties in Kenya was used for this study. Then, a retrospective descriptive cross-sectional study design was utilised to evaluate the prevalence of SCI. **Results:** The findings reveal a predominant prevalence in male patients, accounting for 84.04% of occurrences, with the highest incidence observed among individuals aged 26–35 years (36.15%). Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause, accounting for 45.07% of cases, followed by falls from height accounting for 42.25% of cases and violence, specifically gunshot injuries, which account for 7.04% of incidents. **Conclusion:** The findings of this study provide a comprehensive epidemiology of SCI in three counties in Kenya with male patients recording high prevalence in motor vehicle accidents and falls from height as well as in severity and associated SCI complications. **Clinical implications:** This finding provides significant information on safety awareness and a platform to develop rehabilitation programmes for patients with SCI in Kenya.

Spinal Cord Injury Epidemiology and Causes: A Worldwide Analysis with 2050 Projections

by Minyoung Kim, Woonyoung Jeong, Suho Jang, Jin Hoon Park, Youngoh Bae, Seung Won Lee

Submission received: 29 August 2025. Revised: 28 September 2025. Accepted: 30 September 2025. Published: 10 October 2025.

Healthcare **2025**, *13*(20),2552;

<https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare13202552>

Background/Objectives: The global burden of spinal cord injury (SCI) is increasing due to aging populations and persistent regional disparities, highlighting an urgent need for updated epidemiological data. This study quantifies the global, regional, and national burden of SCI from 1990 to 2021 and projects its prevalence to 2050. **Methods:** Using data from the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) 2021 study, we estimated age-, sex-, and location-specific prevalence and years lived with disability (YLDs). Projections were developed using sociodemographic modeling, with analyses including Bayesian meta-regression (DisMod-MR 2.1) and Das Gupta decomposition. **Results:** In 2021, approximately 14.5 million people worldwide were living with SCI, including 7.30 million with neck-level and 7.22 million with below-neck-level injuries. The age-standardized prevalence per 100,000 people was 88 for neck-level SCI and 95 for below-neck-level SCI. Although age-standardized rates declined slightly from 1990 (−0.17% for neck-level and −0.18% for below-neck-level), the absolute burden increased substantially. This increase was particularly prominent in East Asia and low- and middle-income countries. The highest prevalence was observed in men aged 50–64 years. Projections indicate that global SCI cases will exceed 14.5 million by 2050. **Conclusions:** These findings underscore the growing absolute burden of SCI. Targeted prevention strategies, enhanced rehabilitation services, and equitable healthcare access are crucial to mitigate long-term disability and



improve the quality of life for affected populations worldwide.

INTERNATIONAL REHABILITATION FORUM (IRF)

By Dr Virginia Wilson

The IRF is an NPO in the USA, started in 2009 by Prof Andrew Haig. Emeritus Professor, University of Michigan.

The IRF established a program to train doctors in Africa in Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine, focusing on low-income countries. To date they have graduated several doctors in Ghana, Ethiopia, and Cameroon.

South Africa has no formal post graduate training program for doctors and as a result, all the doctors working in acute rehabilitation facilities in South Africa are self-trained.

The IRF two-year fellowship, which started in South Africa in January 2023 and is a unique opportunity for doctors working in acute rehabilitation to obtain an IRF Diploma

Fellows from the first two-year cohort have now completed the course at the end of 2024, with seven fellows graduating.

At the end of this year, there will be another seven fellows graduating. Ten more will complete their two years at the end of 2026. There are already potentially 10 more fellows who are about to apply for January 2026 and the IRF is looking for more! (*reminder: the course is for **Doctors** only*)

The ISPRM congress is in November this year in Marrakech, and Dr Wilson is taking part in a workshop with the IRF Board and other invited speakers from various countries about the IRF Africa program. The aim is to make the IRF very well-known and encourage more applicants from the rest of Africa. It is anticipated Tanzania should start with fellows

in 2026, and discussions are already in place for Nigeria.

Dr Wilson remains the fellowship advisor for SA, and earlier this year was invited to be an IRF Board member.

Prof Andy Haig, President of IRF, an invited speaker at SASCA in Cape Town in May this year, visited several facilities in CT and JHB and was amazed at the standard of care.

In the background there are efforts to have the IRF Diploma recognised by a SA University and the IRF Board hope to have some positive news in the next few months.

Intriguing? Want to complete your IRF Diploma?

Why not reach out. After all, it is **FREE!!**

Weekly attendance at lecture sessions every Wednesday afternoon is required, and fellows must attend 80 % of the sessions. Each fellow must chair a month and introduce speakers as well as guide the questions. Each month has a different topic.

A logbook must be kept of cases seen over the 2 years of the course, spread over the major topics e.g. CVA/TBI/SCI/ Paeds/ Ortho/Amputations etc.

A research project is required with the aim to publish short papers in relevant journals.

All the IRF board members and the speakers are volunteers, and complete enthusiasts towards the program and its aims.

For more information, please reach out to Dr Wilson on drwilson@rehabdoctor.co.za.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Celebrating Resilience: A Look at Matric Results and the Achievement of Meerhof School

Barry Viljoen



Matric results are always a moment of great significance in the lives of learners. For many, it marks the culmination of years of hard work, sacrifices, and sometimes, struggles. The weeks leading up to the release of these results can be among the most stressful of a learner's academic journey. The pressure to succeed can weigh heavily, as families, teachers, and communities place high expectations on these young adults. It's a time of uncertainty and anticipation, where emotions run high and the pressure to perform can feel overwhelming.

However, amid the anxiety, the celebration of results is a vital moment. Whether learners achieve their desired outcomes or not, it is essential to recognize the resilience, dedication, and effort they have put in throughout their schooling. It is an opportunity to acknowledge the trials and triumphs of this significant chapter of their lives.

In this context, we celebrate not just the academic achievement but the perseverance that learners demonstrate in reaching this milestone. For students at Meerhof School, a specialized institution for learners with disabilities, these qualities shine even brighter. Meerhof has achieved a 100% pass rate in the Matric exams of 2024, a remarkable accomplishment that showcases the incredible resilience and determination of its learners.

The journey to this achievement is anything but easy. Learners at Meerhof face unique challenges, from physical barriers to additional academic support needs. Despite these obstacles, they remain committed to their education, showing the world that determination and grit are not defined by circumstances but by willpower and effort.

For these learners, reaching the finish line of the Matric exams represents not only academic success but also personal victory. It is proof that with the right support, encouragement, and inner strength, anything

is possible. Meerhof's achievement serves as a reminder to all of us that success is not measured by the same standard for everyone, but by the individual hurdles each person overcomes.

In the midst of the stresses and pressures of the Matric season, let's take a moment to celebrate all the learners who have worked tirelessly to reach this point—especially those at Meerhof School, whose resilience continues to inspire. Their success proves that with determination, every learner can achieve their dreams, no matter the challenges they face.

Meerhof's success is part of a larger movement in education—one that strives to show that the achievements of students with disabilities should not be underestimated. While Meerhof is certainly not unique in this regard, the school's accomplishment plays a significant role in challenging societal perceptions and breaking down the stigma often associated with disability. By demonstrating that learners with disabilities are fully capable of excelling academically, these results push back against the social exclusion too often faced by those with disabilities and open doors to greater acceptance and inclusion. It's a powerful reminder that every learner, regardless of ability, deserves to have their potential recognized and celebrated.

Spinal Cord Injuries and the Empowering Role of Sports

By Barry Viljoen

For persons living with spinal cord injuries, the traditional view of sports has often been confined to two distinct categories: rehabilitation and leisure. Rehabilitation has long been seen as the serious, goal-focused activity, intended to aid in recovery, while leisure was considered more recreational, disconnected from the pursuit of physical or emotional recovery. This binary has dominated



much of the conversation around sports and disability. However, we are witnessing a shift in this narrative—one that emphasizes not just physical recovery, but the deep psychological benefits that come from engaging in sports, regardless of one's level of injury.

Sports, in this context, are increasingly recognized as a tool for enhancing autonomy and psychological well-being. Rather than solely serving as a means of physical rehabilitation, sports offer individuals with spinal cord injuries the chance to reclaim control over their lives. Through sports, people can rediscover aspects of themselves that may have felt lost in the wake of their injury. Whether through adaptive sports like wheelchair basketball or handcycling, or through more individualized forms of physical activity, participation becomes an act of empowerment.

The psychological benefits are profound. Engaging in sports allows individuals to challenge their own limitations, expand their boundaries, and re-establish a sense of normalcy. These activities aren't just about physical recovery—they are about returning to aspects of life that many might perceive as lost forever. Sports provide a platform for individuals to experience the joy of competition, social connection, and personal accomplishment. The act of striving towards and achieving a goal in the context of sport, no matter how big or small, is a powerful reminder of autonomy and self-determination.

Furthermore, sports help normalize life with a disability, creating opportunities for individuals to integrate into communities and societal activities in ways that were once restricted. This normalization is crucial, as it shifts public perception from seeing people with disabilities as limited or defined by their condition to recognizing them as active participants in society. Sports become a bridge

to a more inclusive future, where people with disabilities are no longer isolated or confined to the margins but are seen as equals with the same opportunities for growth, success, and happiness as anyone else.

This evolving narrative moves away from the outdated dichotomy of rehabilitation vs. leisure and opens up a more nuanced understanding of the role that sports play in the lives of individuals with spinal cord injuries. The emphasis is no longer solely on rehabilitation for the sake of recovery but on fostering independence, self-expression, and psychological resilience.

As society becomes more attuned to the importance of inclusion, sports have emerged as a cornerstone of this change. They are no longer viewed as a mere therapeutic activity but as a crucial aspect of a person's overall well-being. In this way, sports provide not just a physical outlet, but an emotional and psychological lifeline—helping individuals to build confidence, challenge their own perceptions of what is possible, and embrace a fuller, more integrated life.

Ultimately, sports offer a space for individuals with spinal cord injuries to move beyond their injury, creating a new narrative of possibility and empowerment. As such sports for those with spinal cord injuries are not merely a means to an end—they are a testament to resilience, a bridge to greater self-esteem, and a step toward a future where living with a disability is simply living, full of opportunity and possibility. It is through these activities that they can redefine what it means to live a fulfilling life, not defined by disability but by the courage to engage fully with the world around them.



INFO CORNER:

QuadPara Association of South Africa Services

The QuadPara Association of South Africa (QASA) is considered the leading agency representing persons with spinal cord injury and physical disability in South Africa. QASA is a NPO of Quadriplegics and Paraplegics. QASA strives to develop products, programmes and services in order to develop capacity amongst



its members and to offer opportunities for societal integration.

QASA has a variety of services available for all wheelchair users (see their website for more details), but

three which we would like to draw your attention to is their performance of access audits, assistance with providing disabled parking permits as well as distribution of their 'Bags of Hope', an initiative shared with Coloplast which aims to provide spinal cord injured patients with basic resources to help provide information to the newly injured patient including information on spinal cord injury and its consequences, coping with mobility impairment, sexuality and sexual options after SCI, and the rights of persons with disabilities. The publications are available in English and isiZulu format and in a pictorial format for people who cannot read. These bags are distributed by **Coloplast** representatives all over the country.

It is important to know that **Wheelchair Parking Bays & Discs** are specifically intended for persons who use wheelchairs and drive themselves, or who are transported in a vehicle. These parking bays are set aside for wheelchair users at most public settings and are not only close to the entrance, but are

also wider than the average parking bay, to cater for a wheelchair user who needs the extra space to enter or exit the vehicle. This extra space helps these transfers to be done safely for the wheelchair user & helps prevent the vehicle in the parking space nearby from getting damaged.

Persons who use these parking bays need to apply for a Wheelchair Parking Permit, also known as a "Disabled Parking Permit", or "Disabled Badge", which is displayed on the vehicle upon parking it in one of these bays. QASA can assist in obtaining this permit to ensure appropriate users make use of these facilities. QASA also has a dedicated WhatsApp number to name and shame offenders using accessible parking bays in public parking areas across the country, who are not wheelchair users. If you see someone misusing an accessible demarcated parking bay, take a photo (include the location, date and time) and send it QASA's WhatsApp number. Ensure that the vehicle registration is clear and the wheelchair parking sign is visible. The dedicated WhatsApp number will allow QASA to deal with offenders accordingly and report them to the local authorities to deal with. A fine for parking in an accessible parking space, without the correct accreditation, could be up to R1000.

An **access audit** is a form of inspection that can be used to assess the ease of access to, and



ease of use of an environment (such as a building or landscape), a service, or a facility, by people with a range of access impairments. Everyone has the right to be able to fully participate within society, and the built environment and accessibility plays a vital role in achieving this goal. Person's with mobility



impairments are faced with physical barriers that exclude them from societal integration, be that in the workplace, educational & recreational facilities.

Bearing this in mind it is of utmost importance that we make our spaces accessible, it is not only an issue of equality and justice, but it makes good business sense and adds to contributing to the development of a more inclusive and equal society. QASA has therefore committed themselves to assisting with helping ensure these spaces are accessible so that no person with mobility limitations is restricted as a result of a poorly built environment.

See QASA's website (qasa.co.za/services/) for more information on how to utilize or obtain these services, or contact them on info@qasa.co.za

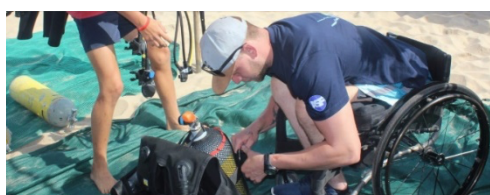
The Adaptive Sports Fund (ASF)

The Adaptive Sports Fund (ASF) is a Non-Profit Company (NPC 2015/074503/08) and a Section 18A tax-exempted Public Benefit Organisation dedicated to encourage people with disabilities to have equal opportunities to participate in sports and physical activity, and where their abilities are celebrated and embraced by all members of the sports community.

Their vision is to advocate for the rights and needs of people with disabilities, and to



Seen someone abusing a wheelchair parking bay?
Send us a photo of their vehicle and we will do something about it. WhatsApp 073 853 9675



promote greater inclusion and accessibility in all areas of society. We aim to provide support and resources that empower individuals with disabilities to achieve their goals and live their best lives.

ASF is actively involved in fundraising, volunteering, and through promoting adaptive sports through its social media platforms, and they aim to inspire and motivate others to continue 'living life' while promoting inclusivity in sports for people with disabilities.

Every year, there are a variety of adaptive sports days which are targeted at both able and disabled individuals to increase inclusivity within the sporting sectors of South Africa. Events such as adapted go-karting, adaptive golf, wheelchair rugby, adaptive scuba diving and adaptive rock climbing (to name a few) are organized throughout Gauteng, and people of all ages and abilities are encouraged to attend and try out these sports. These days have been thoroughly enjoyed by all and the atmosphere created continues to grow and form new and old friendships.

Their motto of 'No limits, just life' has inspired many people to become more active and involved in sport and in doing so, improve community reintegration, social participation and overall quality of life.

Look out on their website (<https://www.adaptivesportsfund.org/>) for more information specifically around dates of events as well as ways you can get involved.





IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER:

Wings For Life: 10 May 2026

Go to:

<https://www.wingsforlifeworldrun.com/en>

to register!



International Day of Persons with Disability:
03 December 2025



CONNECT WITH US!

Why join SASCA?

- Access to latest developments/research in SCI
- Access to workshops and congresses at a reduced rate
- Opportunity for CPD points
- Help build the body of knowledge to improve quality of care of spinal injured persons
- Networking with colleagues

Visit <https://www.sasca.org.za/> for more information on how to become a member!



Southern African
Spinal Cord
Association



membership@sasca.org

or

info@sasca.org



Adaptive Sports Fund



GAUTENG PROVINCE
HEALTH
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA