

## Spinal cord injuries

*Annual review programme*



## Spinal cord injuries review programme

Life Rehabilitation is well equipped to offer holistic assessments and reviews of all body systems and functions, as well as inter-disciplinary and ongoing management and care for people living with SCI. Our eight rehabilitation units throughout South Africa are staffed with teams of highly experienced rehabilitation professionals, including

one to two rehabilitation doctors per unit, nursing staff with a special interest in rehabilitation, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, dietitians, counsellors and social workers.

Our clinical outcomes for these clients, as measured through the use of internationally acknowledged benchmarks, ensuring that our patient outcomes are objectively measured and reported on.

### Why reassess clients living with spinal cord injuries regularly?

Sustaining a spinal cord injury can be devastating, but the effects can be much worse if the person does not take the necessary steps to prevent potential complications after discharge from acute rehabilitation.

Mortality rates are significantly higher during the first year after injury<sup>2</sup> and the leading cause of death is renal failure<sup>3</sup>, followed by pneumonia and septicaemia.

Not only is the person with SCI at increased risk of death, but s/he is also prone to more frequent hospitalisations. The most common cause, bladder and kidney dysfunction is usually due to stones and / or infection<sup>4</sup>. This highlights the importance of proper and regular assessment and management of bladder and kidney function.

The second most common cause of rehospitalisation is pressure ulcers. Not only do ulcers cause significant discomfort and limit a person's functioning, it is also very costly to treat. Poor nutrition, depression and / or incorrect wheelchair cushions all contribute to the causes of pressure ulcers. It is therefore essential that persons living with spinal cord injuries attend regular follow-up visits, so that professionals can assess the person's weight and nutrition, emotional status and equipment.

Other possible complications of a SCI include spasticity, deep vein thrombosis, osteoporosis and fractures, cardiovascular disease and neuropathic pain. Postural deformities, joint stiffness, muscle shortening or imbalances (due to incorrect seating or positioning) and poor endurance are additional complications. These impact a person's ability to live independently and cause significant suffering / morbidity.

It is thus critical that a specialised team of professionals with expertise in managing acute and chronic complications in SCI, assess and manage these people with a view to anticipate and manage these complications early before they become irreversible.

People living with tetraplegia, have an additional risk of autonomic dysreflexia and respiratory system dysfunctions (such as atelectasis, pneumonia, and aspiration) and these will be compounded if the person has additional lifestyle diseases. People living with tetraplegia, therefore, require particular and precise management.

In South Africa, rigorous and routine follow up of persons with SCI, by a team of appropriate specialists, is not common practice, which explains why the SCI complications are widespread and possibly more prevalent than necessary.



The SCI review programme provides patients and families with continued access to a rehabilitation doctor and team of expert rehabilitation professionals.

## **Benefits of a review programme of clients living with spinal cord injuries**

This SCI annual review programme provides patients and families with access to a rehabilitation doctor and a team of expert rehabilitation professionals. This team provides a variety of services to help patients maintain or regain their level of physical function and good health. This is a proactive approach to reducing complications and preventing future hospitalisation by managing a person's condition. Life Rehabilitation has streamlined its SCI follow-up service into a focused and structured annual programme, which is run over five days.

The benefits of Life Rehabilitation's annual review programme include the following:

- Prevention and management of short term and long term complications which if left untreated, can ultimately result in serious complications.
- Increased patient and family's understanding of the causes of possible complications such as pressure ulcers, bone density loss, urinary tract infections, postural deformities and how to combat these and how to manage them pro-actively.
- Empowered individuals who can integrate back into their communities and resume life as productive citizens.
- Assessment of bladder and kidney function will determine the risk of renal failure which is the leading cause of complications for persons living with SCI.
- Sexual health assessment and appropriate referrals.





## Which clients with SCI can benefit from this programme?

All persons who have sustained a SCI should be followed up on an annual basis, especially persons with tetraplegia. They should be referred to assess their current health status and to prevent any future complications.

## How to go about referring a client for the programme

Case management is carried out according to the Life Rehabilitation standard process.

A client with SCI should be referred for a routine annual follow up or when complications arise. The specialist or general practitioner should contact the nearest Life Rehabilitation unit. The rehabilitation admissions consultant will conduct a pre-admission assessment of the client within 24 hours of the referral, to determine the potential benefits of rehabilitation and to optimise the timing of admission.

The admissions consultant will discuss the admission and any queries regarding the rehabilitation process with the referring specialist or general practitioner, the client and his / her family.

Patients who were previously treated at Life Rehabilitation facilities will be contacted annually to arrange a readmission.

Authorisation for admission will be requested from the funder.





Outpatient services can be considered for persons living in the vicinity of the unit. Inpatient services are recommended for those who live further away.

## Five day spinal cord injury follow up programme offered on an inpatient or outpatient basis

The week long review programme is run from Monday to Friday and includes:

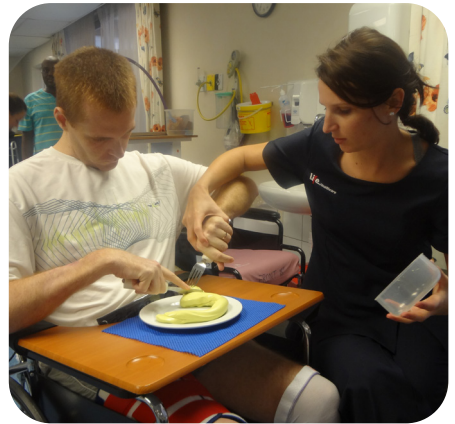
- identification and management of current, as well as potential problems;
- review of the genito-urinary system and further management of incontinence and sexual health;
- continence and sexual health management;
- review of assistive devices, and identification of the need for additional assistive devices;

- review of coping and adjustment, and the implementation of coping strategies;
- review of function and independence within the home, community and work environments;
- assessment of vocational skills and recommendation for vocational training;
- liaison with the employer and recommendations regarding return to work options; and
- assessment of caregiver knowledge, skills and provision of caregiver support.

On discharge, a referral will be made to available community resources, for support.

## Tariff

Life Rehabilitation's follow-up programme aims to offer an affordable solution to improve the quality of life for people living with SCI. The tariff constitutes a substantial saving compared to individual fee for services billing, making it accessible for more people and ensuring that our expertise reaches and positively changes more lives. The cost effective and comprehensive tariff is inclusive of all acute rehabilitation professional services as well as one urodynamic study. Medication, investigations for diagnostic purposes, specialist consults, blood tests and assistive devices (if necessary) are excluded from the global tariff.

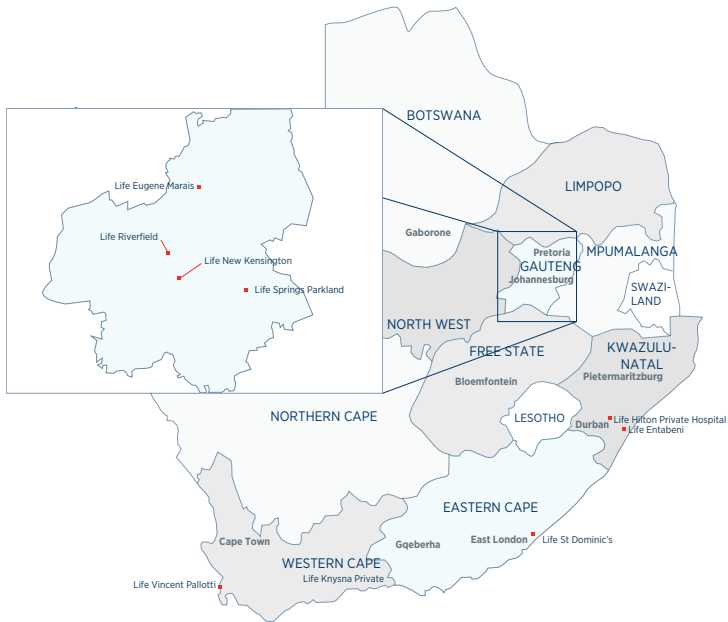


### What our patients say

*"I am happy – I can transfer from the bed to my chair on my own. My balance is much better. When I transfer myself – it's very simple, it's not as difficult as before. I can do it. They taught me more things, like how to help myself. Most of the things I can do myself. I can wash myself. Because it is better now, it is simpler. It was very good and this programme is a good idea. Even though I have a spinal problem, I realize I can still do lots of things." - Mr NF Selapa, paraplegic client, 1st review*

*"I am so grateful that they all persevered with me, that I was taught how to cope and the importance of carrying myself the same way as I did before – with confidence. They were all happy to see my progress which made me feel good about myself – I'm very glad they gave me back my life." - Ms N Nxumalo, paraplegic, 1st review*





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