

Ageing with spinal cord injury: Health professional perspectives

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Introduction

More people with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) are growing older and knowledge about their experience of ageing with SCI is limited. The impact of age-related functional changes on i) maintaining quality of life and ii) participation in social, productivity and leisure activities will have increasing personal consequences and broader socio-economic perspectives. In Australia, inconsistencies between aged care services available for people over 65 years and disability services via the NDIS for people under 65 years provide additional challenges for those with SCI to negotiate. A previous scoping review¹ indicated that the majority of evidence on this topic is focused on physiological aspects, with limited exploration of the experience of ageing with SCI. As a result, a series of interview studies was undertaken to explore the perspectives of consumers, health professionals, and carers. This study examines health professionals' experiences of supporting people ageing with SCI.

Study aims

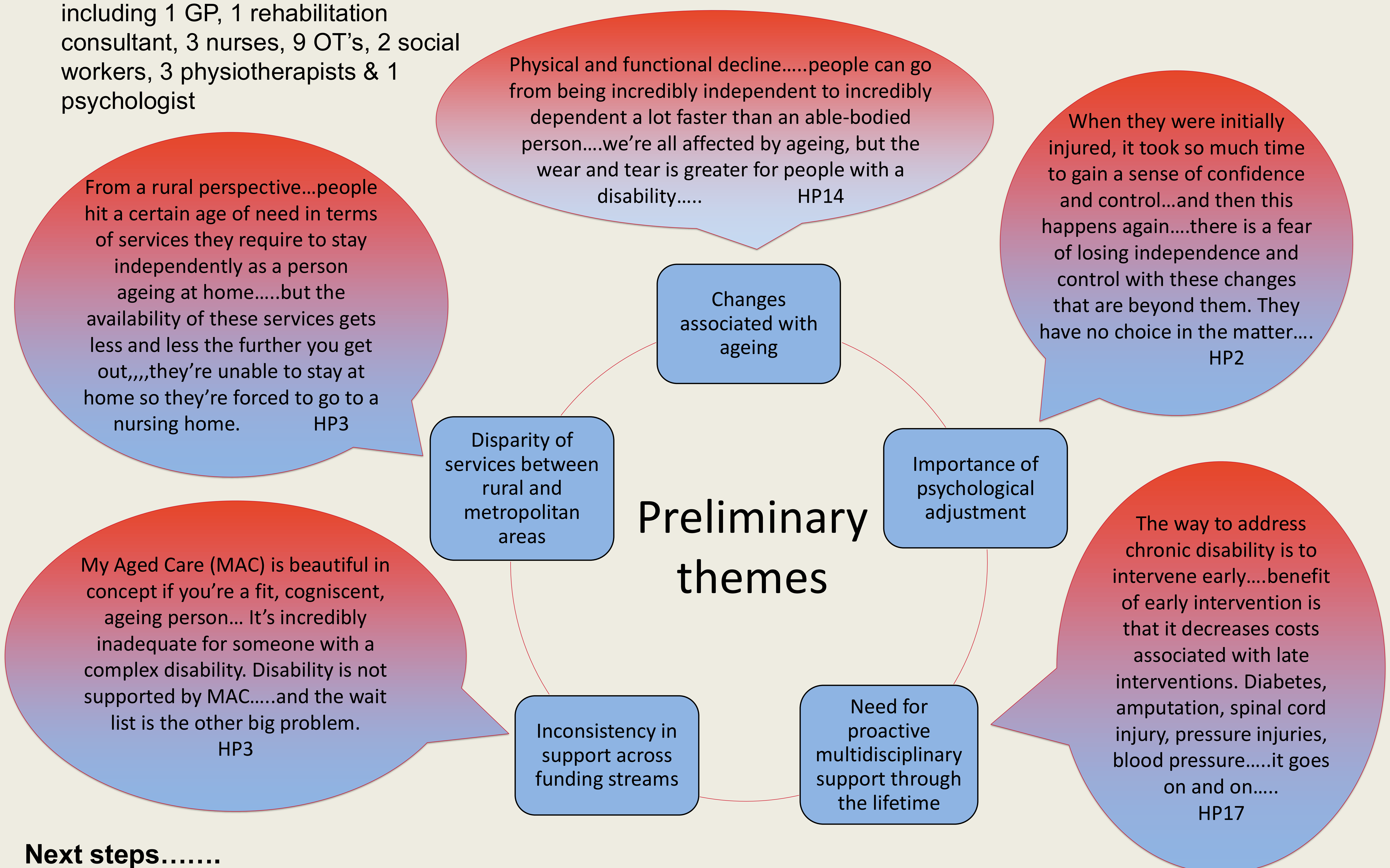
- To explore health professionals' experiences supporting people ageing with SCI, including the challenges encountered and supports required to facilitate ageing well, to guide future policy, education and resources for clinical practice

Methods

- A Consumer Advisory Panel consisting of 7 people with lived experience co-designed the study reviewed results to ensure relevance
- Snowballing recruitment strategy
- 1-hour online interviews with health professionals working with people ageing with SCI
- Interviews transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis

Results

- 20 health professionals interviewed, including 1 GP, 1 rehabilitation consultant, 3 nurses, 9 OT's, 2 social workers, 3 physiotherapists & 1 psychologist



Next steps.....

- Consolidate results from health professional, lived experience, carer and residential aged care interviews
- Collaborate with the Consumer Advisory Panel to identify and formulate a set of recommendations to support health professionals with provision of education and services that will improve the experience of ageing with spinal cord injury

Conclusions and implications for practice

The experience of ageing is impacted by physical, cognitive and psychosocial changes, psychological adjustment, funding and disability/aged care/health policy and service availability and provision all of which are fundamental to health professional practice

- Allied health professionals are well-positioned to advocate and promote meaningful change for people with SCI, including modifications to policy and proactive services, funding structures, health resourcing and education, ensuring that they can age well, consistent with their able-bodied peers

References:

- Tan, E., Mackenzie, L., Wesson, J., Clifton, S. (2025). Ageing with spinal cord injury: A scoping review (Under review by Journal of Disability and Rehabilitation)