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## Conference Abstract

### **Spinal Cord Connections Resource Centre: Promoting health for people growing older with a spinal cord injury.**

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## Abstract

In World War One few of the soldiers incurring spinal cord injuries survived long enough to return home. Of the few that did, only 10 percent survived longer than a year. With advances in treatments many people with spinal cord injuries now live healthy lives for many decades post-injury. However evidence shows that people with spinal cord injuries (SCI) age prematurely in terms of their cardiovascular, endocrine, and musculoskeletal systems. Compared to the able-bodied population, people with spinal cord injuries are also more likely to have problems with their skin, bowel, and bladder over time.

The education of a person with a spinal cord injury about living with their injury, and that person's motivation to commit to lifelong learning, is a major determinant of living well in the community. Education can help the person with an SCI promote health, reducing or preventing the serious complications associated with SCI. In the last two years, the Spinal Cord Rehabilitation Program at Toronto Rehab and the Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario (CPA Ontario) have developed the physical and virtual Spinal Cord Connections Resource Centres (Resource Centres).

Toronto Rehab's Lyndhurst Centre is the largest spinal cord rehabilitation program in Canada and provides inpatient, outpatient and follow-up care, including a large number of specialized services and clinics. CPA Ontario is a provincial community service organization dedicated to assisting people with SCI and other physical disabilities to achieve independence, self-reliance and full community participation. The physical and virtual Resource Centres provide an innovative model for adult learning combining professional expertise with practical experience.

We provide resources and information in a variety of formats to enable accessible, responsive learning opportunities for people with spinal cord injuries and their families and caregivers. We offer customized resources online through the virtual Resource Centre, and face-to-face learning opportunities in the physical Resource Centre located at Lyndhurst. Staff and volunteers are trained to

provide customized information in response to requests. All our volunteers are also volunteers in CPA Ontario's Peer Support program which makes them uniquely suited to connect with users based on their experiential expertise. The physical Resource Centre also offers workshops designed to meet the needs of consumers in the community living long-term with an SCI. This is part of a comprehensive education program at Lyndhurst and CPA Ontario that addresses patients' and clients' needs across the continuum. At our workshops we have approximately two thirds community members living with their injury for more than ten years and one third inpatients who are more recently injured. Currently we offer two educational workshops per month based on a specific theme. Our most popular themes to date are travel, nutrition, pain management, recreation, equipment, and sexuality.

In 2011 we plan to add six sessions developed for online audiences to broaden our reach beyond the Greater Toronto Area. In Spring 2010 Accreditation Canada identified the Resource Centres as a leading practice, both creative and innovative, efficient, and adaptable by other organizations. The Resource Centres also meets strategic priorities for both organizations and align with the strategic directions of the LHIN. Both CPA Ontario and Toronto Rehab hope to replicate this model in other programs and regions.

## **Keywords**

**aging, spinal cord injury, health, resource centres**

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Presentation available from the [FICCDAT Growing Older conference site](#)