



# Huntington's Disease - the benefits for residents of using correct seating

Mike Wooldridge with Helena Elcocks, national sales manager, Repose

Huntington's Disease was first written about by George Huntington, a practicing GP working in New England in 1872. Originally a European disease, it was spread around the world by European sailors and travellers.

As with many diseases, people working with those living with Huntington's are always looking for new developments of equipment which will help their patients and increase their levels of comfort and dignity. One such solution is the Harlem Porter chair from Repose Furniture which has been developed in conjunction with Mike Wooldridge, who is one of the UK's leading experts in caring for people with the disease and Kate Sheehan, Repose's resident OT.

Mike has been working with people with Huntington's disease for over 30 years and has seen many changes in the way people are cared for.

## Importance of correct seating

"I started working in large mental institutions in 1969 and healthcare

wasn't like it is today," he said. In the mid-70s people started looking at solutions that might help people with Huntington's and one of the first things they looked at was seating. People with Huntington's have strong involuntary movements and a suitable robust chair was required which would stop them sliding down or falling out."

The disease is a genetic condition with people carrying the gene having a 50% chance of passing it onto their children. A brief review of the number of patients cared for by the Huntington Disease Association in the UK indicated that approximately 6,700 individuals are currently living with HD. This means that one out of every 8,065 individuals may be affected.

Mike has seen various developments in seating over the years and believes that the Harlem Porter chair is one of the best seating solutions he has seen. He is currently working with several service users who now use a Harlem.

"We have a lady in her forties in Horncastle who has been using a

Harlem for several months. Prior to getting her new chair, she had to spend all her time in a wheelchair which was not bespoke and therefore did not meet her specific requirements. We knew she needed an alternative seating solution and having worked with Repose I knew the Harlem would be perfect and had no reservations in recommending it to her and her family. They wanted to know that what we were suggesting would make a difference and without a doubt the chair has had a huge impact and has been a great benefit as she can now sit in a comfortable position. She is happier in herself and this makes it easier to care for her and also means she is more willing to interact as she feels settled and content".

## What could more traditional homes do to help people with Huntington's Disease?

"I think the important thing is for those of us who have experience of supporting people with Huntington's to share our knowledge," he said. "That way, hopefully our colleagues who are

running care homes can ensure they are providing their service users with the same level of quality care that we are delivering.

“The big problem is if people are not aware of the products available then they cannot recommend them for their service users. I would also urge people to contact the Huntington’s Disease Association as they can offer fantastic advice and support for people not used to working with the condition.”

### **What should be taken into consideration when designing furniture for someone with Huntington’s Disease?**

“The involuntary movements associated with Huntington’s can be extremely powerful despite the patient appearing frail, and their constant

movement puts a huge amount of pressure and wear and tear on all parts of the chair. There are also issues with pressure sores from force and friction.

“The constant movement back and forth and repositioning means that someone with Huntington’s may require up to 5000 calories a day just to maintain body weight due to the constant movements and weight loss can be significant which puts the client at greater risk of pressure related issues.

“It is extremely important to provide people with Huntington’s with the correct level of support around the head, neck and body to prevent them getting into positions which do not provide good postural support.

“There are also issues regarding manual handling as when they stand

up they will not necessarily follow exact instructions due to their involuntary movements. All these concerns were taken into consideration during the design of the Harlem. For example, reinforcing the footrest to ensure it could withstand somebody standing on it without it moving.

“The original structure of the chair was also strengthened so when someone moves in an unusual way they would still receive the core support from the chair with their body shape maintaining a good position. Another factor we took into consideration was maintenance costs. People with Huntington’s put an incredible amount of stress on furniture. For example, if someone continually puts their leg over the arm of the chair it will eventually wear out the fabric, so we designed each part to be easily replaceable if required” concluded Mike.

Lisa Wardley, Repose’s managing director, commented: “I know from the feedback we have already received that people with Huntington’s and their carers are already benefitting from this when they try out the Harlem Porter chair for themselves.”

Available in small, medium and large, the Harlem Porter has a maximum user weight of 20 stone. Standard features include an independent back rest recline with a range of angles and seat angle adjustment to reduce the risk of a patient falling out.

There is also a deep padded seat area for additional safety and comfort, a choice of six interchangeable back styles facilitating different pressure management and posture solutions and four different seat cushion options to accommodate different comfort and pressure management requirements depending on the user. Further safety features include high arms and a sliding padded footplate for ease of patient movement.

For more information or to find your nearest retailer call 0844 7766001, email [info@reposefurniture.co.uk](mailto:info@reposefurniture.co.uk) or visit [www.reposefurniture.co.uk](http://www.reposefurniture.co.uk)



Helena Elcocks with Leti, a carer who works with service users that have benefitted from the chair