

## **A. Kassioukov, E. MacHattie, K. Naphtali, W. C. Miller, S. Elliott: pleasureABLE: Sexual device manual for persons with disabilities**

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The concept that sexuality is an aspect of physical and emotional wellness that is often impacted by a spinal cord injury/disorder (SCI/D) is common knowledge among rehabilitation professionals. Many of these professionals have a desire to help their patients in this area of wellness just like any other area, and to assist individuals in addressing and overcoming changes that have occurred in order to restore or maximize functioning as much as possible. However, while we have extensive recommendations for assistive devices in almost every other domain of functioning (e.g., eating, bathing, mobility, sports/recreation), it is not always as simple when it comes to sexuality. First, the level of comfort to engage in discussion and problem-solve in the area of sexuality can be an issue, both for the individual who has sustained an injury and the professional. Second, until recently, the availability of and easy access to assistive sexual devices was limited. Fortunately, this latter barrier has been reduced through the development and publication of “pleasure-ABLE: Sexual device manual for persons with disabilities”.

The manual is practical and informative with an emphasis on enhancing ability and diminishing barriers to a healthy sex life. A myriad of specific devices is described for all levels of ability. Information pertaining to purchasing, price, cleaning, safety precautions, and special considerations is provided for each device. In addition, each description is accompanied by a photo or illustration of the device. The only noticeable shortcoming is the lack of a specific description of various uses for some of the devices. This is especially important for individuals unfamiliar with such devices and who may be exploring for the first time with previously considered “non-traditional” sexual practices or never had the

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Manual Located at [www.scisexualhealth.com](http://www.scisexualhealth.com) (Free Download)

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awareness of such experience. For example, one sexual device in the manual is the “magic wand”. The variety of functions it could serve for men and women with different levels of sensory input is not outlined. On the other hand, popular uses for other devices are available. For instance, dildos are described in such a way that someone previously unfamiliar with them could understand their various uses.

A strength of the manual is the fact that it goes beyond a listing of devices by discussing general anatomy, suggestions for planning sexual activity, general safety issues when engaging in sexual activity, and positioning. Indeed, a catalog of devices without these essential topics would not be in the best interest of those who will use them. There is a helpful reminder that one must be aware of the individual’s specific body abilities and sensations, and weigh the risks and benefits of utilizing any product or suggestion. Additionally, interspersed throughout the manual are positive quotations related to sexuality as well as sexual “myths and realities”. The quotations enhance the manual by making it less technical and more focused on the overall goal of a healthy, pleasurable sex life. The sexual “myths and realities” are helpful in normalizing differences in sexuality after an injury. For example, one challenges the myth that sex should be spontaneous and effortless. Of note, some of the myths and realities (e.g., one related to masturbation) could be considered controversial, depending on one’s cultural background or personal beliefs. A statement making note of differing cultural and individualized views of sexuality may have been nice, though we would assume that someone who is interested in the manual is deliberately seeking out the information and would thus not be offended by it. Overall, the manual does a nice job of being inclusive of those from different backgrounds. For instance, it is not limiting to those in a partnership, or to those with a specific sexual orientation.

The existence of such a manual, and the availability of the devices it describes, speaks to the normalcy and increased acceptance of exploring sexuality after a spinal cord injury/disorder. It is important to note that the use of many of the devices in the manual is not limited to those with SCI/D. Indeed, “sex toys” are used in the American population in general. This fact may be helpful to mention in such a manual, so as to further normalize the use of such devices and to remind readers that achieving a pleasurable sex life is a goal common to many people of all abilities and backgrounds.

Taken as a whole, the publication represents a much needed resource for realistic discussion and meaningful application in terms of access, both for individuals with SCI/D and rehabilitation professionals. Both parties are sure to find it well organized, thorough, and useful.

As a wonderful aside commentary, the opportunity to meet the author and some members of the project team (Dr. Krassioukov, Dr. Stacy Elliott, Kate Naphtali and Edith MacHattie) at the 2009 Annual Conference of the Academy of Spinal Cord Injury Professions in Dallas, Texas provided additional insights of a dedicated mission to increase knowledge, minimize further impairment, improve levels of ability, and enhance community participation of persons with disability. In fact, the authors of the manual invite questions or feedback and can be reached via email at [dhrnmanual@gmail.com](mailto:dhrnmanual@gmail.com). During our conversation, Dr. Krassioukov’s parting words of wisdom and insight to always keep in mind was “We are all ABLE!”