**PRESS RELEASE**

* **Chartered Physiotherapists celebrate World Physiotherapy Day 2014**
* **Physiotherapy transforms Paralympics athlete’s mobility**

Members of the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists will join physiotherapists around the world to celebrate World Physiotherapy Day today (8th September 2014).

The theme of World Physiotherapy Day for 2014 is ‘Fit to take part’ which highlights the role which physiotherapists play in helping people with long-term illnesses or disabilities to become independent and fulfil their potential.

One such person is Katie O Brien.

Katie is 17 years old and she has Spina Bifida. Katie was told that she would never walk but through sheer determination, and with the help of her parents, surgeons and her Chartered Physiotherapist, she overcame this challenge and is no longer confined to a wheelchair.

Katie has undergone major surgery several times in her life, as an infant and again in her early teens. Physiotherapy sessions assisted hugely in Katie’s recovery from surgery and she has gone on to take up many activities including horseriding and most recently, rowing.

She was the first Irish woman to compete in her category at the prestigious Royal Henley Regatta and brought home Gold to her club. She then went on to compete in the home internationals in Cork representing Ireland and again claimed the gold medal.

Commented Katie, "Without physiotherapy I don't think my quality of life would be the same, it's helped me to feel capable of achieving anything without being impacted on by my disability. "

Katie is now training for a place at the 2016 Paralympic games in Rio in 2016 where she hopes to compete in the trunk and arms classification, but she needs a team mate to qualify under Paralympic rules.

Physiotherapy now forms part of Katie’s daily training for Rio and she worked with with Enable Ireland Chartered Physiotherapist Michèle Marvesley to overcome her difficulties physically.

Says Michèle Marvesley, “Katie was referred to us for physiotherapy when she was two years of age and we have worked with her ever since. Katie always presented as an active little girl despite her diagnosis of spina bifida.”

“We worked with her to reduce her pain, to improve weakness in lower limbs, trunk and spine, to maintain range of motion (ROM) in her foot and ankle and maintain her postural awareness and positioning.”

“Also included in Katie’s program were strengthening and stretching programs. In the early stages we used neurotech, a form of electrical stimulation for improving functional activity in weak and minimally active muscles. Hydrotherapy and circuit training have also been part of her physiotherapy program.”

Added Michèle, “Katie has always incorporated physiotherapy into the activities she is involved in including horse riding and rowing which are great tools for promoting core stability, mobility and strengthening. We wish Katie every success in her search for a partner for the Paralympics in Rio.”

International research indicates that people with a disability are less likely to be employed or to be playing an active part in society. This costs some economies 7% of their GDP. And yet with interventions, such as physiotherapy, this situation can improve considerably.

Instead of the Government recognising the importance of physiotherapy in Ireland, there has been a fall in the number of physiotherapists per head of the population in recent years. Ireland has one of the lowest ratios of physotherapists per capita in the EU at 0.52 per 1,000 of the population in comparison with the Netherlands which has 1.35 or Finland with 2.82 physiotherapists per head of the population. 70% of Irish physiotherapy graduates from the last three years don’t work in physiotherapy and many emigrate.

In a National Survey carried out by the ISCP in 2013, the majority of Irish physiotherapy services in 2013 were operating with 80% or below average staffing levels (with some as low as 35%) when compared to the same period in 2007.

Jill Long, President of the ISCP, said **“**Inadequate physiotherapy staffing levels do not make sense when physiotherapy is seen as key to preventing the admission of many patients to expensive acute services. For those admitted to hospitals, access to regular physiotherapy can reduce length of stay and enable patients to live active, confident and sociable lives within their communities.The message needs to go out to politicians and other policy makers today, on World Physiotherapy Day, that physiotherapists are worth the investment.”

***The ISCP is a national, professional body, respected and recognised both within and outside the profession, as the voice of Physiotherapy in Ireland. The Society has over 3,000 members.***

**Ends.**

Media enquiries or to arrange an interview with Katie O’Brien or Michèle Marvesley, Chartered Physiotherapist, contact Niamh Quinn, Communications Manager, ISCP 087 122 0119.

**Notes to editors:**

1. We have further case studies and patient stories available; please contact Niamh Quinn, Communications Manager at the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists.
2. Recent research has shown that physiotherapy and exercise, in particular progressive strength training, treadmill training, Tai Chi, dancing (set dancing and Tango) can all help improve mobility for people with Parkinson’s by improving walking speed, aerobic capacity, balance, strength and flexibility.
3. In Multiple Sclerosis, a recent review of studies demonstrated clearly that exercise can significantly reduce the impact of fatigue; studies also show benefits of exercise on mobility.
4. The British Thoracic Society’s Guidelines on Pulmonary Rehabilitation state “Physical exercise can help improve exercise capacity, shortness of breath, muscle strength, mobility, physiological wellbeing and general health status.”
5. The ISCP survey mentioned above was carried out amongst all public and voluntary health service Physiotherapy Managers across Ireland’s acute, community and voluntary services regarding their physiotherapy staffing levels on that day. The response rate was over 65%.