

# THE WHO NEWSLETTER ON DISABILITY AND REHABILITATION

Issue No. 1, May 2007

This is the first issue of a new WHO newsletter dedicated to disability and rehabilitation and aimed to keep you abreast of WHO's activities in this area. It will be produced three times a year and distributed via e-mail. Subscription/unsubscription requests should be sent to WHO's Disability and Rehabilitation Team at the following e-mail address: [saiton@who.int](mailto:saiton@who.int)

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## FEATURES

### World report on disability and rehabilitation

In May 2005, the World Health Assembly requested WHO to produce a status report on disability and rehabilitation (Resolution WHA58.23 on Disability, including prevention, management and rehabilitation). One of the key functions of such a report, which will draw on the best available scientific evidence from around the world, is to provide governments and civil society with a comprehensive description and analysis of the significance of disability and the responses to it and make recommendations for action. The availability of this knowledge will play an important role in awareness creation, intensifying networks and shaping policies in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Above all, this report represents the first step in a longer term process aimed at enhancing collaboration and the complementariness of actions across sectors to promote respect for the inherent dignity of persons with disabilities and to ensure their full participation in every facet of life.

The Editorial Committee, comprising nine external experts from different world regions, met in early December 2006 in Geneva to elaborate the report's objectives (see Box 1), its target audience, a process for its development, as well as a draft structure and contents. Chapter teams (i.e. small groups of individuals with responsibility for drafting the text of each chapter) are currently being selected. Every effort is being made to draw knowledge and experience from a diverse mix of persons with disabilities,

## EDITORIAL

### The challenges facing WHO at "the dawn of a new era"

Etienne Krug, Director  
*Violence and Injuries Prevention*



The landmark United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities heralds the need for a major shift in the way people with disabilities are

treated. It is widely recognized that disability has yet to be given the attention it deserves, both as a development issue and as a human rights issue. As the lead United Nations agency for public health, WHO occupies a unique position and thus has a specific contribution to make in terms of raising the profile of disability. We intend to focus our contribution on those areas where we can make the greatest difference, namely, in strengthening community based and medical rehabilitation (and access to it), improving data collection, and supporting policy development in accordance with the principles of the Convention. Disability will need to become a higher priority in all WHO's programme areas and also progressively cross-cutting. There is much to be done but our resources, both human and financial, are modest. We will therefore look to deepening collaboration with all our partners in order to achieve these goals.

It is hoped that WHO's current activities, outlined in the Plan of Action 2006–2011, will provide the impetus to bring about change. For instance, the planned *World report on disability and rehabilitation* will help to increase attention and document the shifts in policy and practice needed to address the gaps in approach and attitude. The new guidelines on community based rehabilitation are intended to assist development of community-level action that equalizes opportunities for people with disabilities through programmes targeted on human rights, poverty reduction and inclusion. Reports on both of these activities feature in this first WHO newsletter devoted to disability and rehabilitation issues, which we hope, in addition to the website will keep you informed of key initiatives within WHO.

scholars, health-care professionals and other experts to ensure as broad a disability, interdisciplinary and geographic perspective as possible. The next key date in the report's production timetable is the review of the detailed chapter outlines, scheduled for 18–19 June 2007.

**Box 1: Objectives of the *World report on disability and rehabilitation***

- ◆ To summarize existing information on the status of disability, rehabilitation, inclusion and the lived experience of persons with disabilities.
- ◆ To document the evidence base demonstrating the gap between what exists and what is required.
- ◆ To issue a call to action, and to propose a path forward that is set in an evidence-based framework.

A first draft of the complete report will be available at the end of 2007 for review by the Editorial and Advisory Committees. The report will then be reviewed by many stakeholder in regional consultations in early 2008 to assess the proposed content and to further develop collaboration with those who will be responsible for follow-up activities in the field. A peer review process will be undertaken before finalization.

The Advisory Committee includes representatives from organizations of persons with disabilities, professional associations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), experts and various United Nations agencies who will, in addition to reviewing the content of the report, lend political support for its launch and implementation.

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## Improving wheelchair provision in developing countries

**A joint initiative of WHO, the International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics (ISPO) and USAID**

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For many people who have mobility impairments, a wheelchair offers personal mobility and is often the "first step" towards greater inclusion and participation. Currently, an estimated 1% of the world's population, or just over 65 million people, need a wheelchair. This need is increasing due to the combination of population growth, ageing, and higher prevalence of chronic conditions, injuries and conflicts.

Personal mobility is a fundamental human right that has been reinforced by article 20 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which asks State Parties to facilitate production and access to quality mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies at affordable cost. In many developing countries, however, access to wheelchairs and other aids is woefully inadequate. Most people cannot afford to buy a wheelchair, and although it is the State's responsibility to provide a wheelchair in such cases, due to limited availability, many find themselves relying on donated wheelchairs, which are often of poor quality and fail to meet an individual's particular needs. The lack of wheelchair availability, coupled with a lack of awareness, means that many people believe that any chair with wheels is worthy of distribution.

To facilitate greater access to quality wheelchairs, a Consensus Conference on Wheelchairs for Developing Countries was organized in Bangalore, India (6–11 November 2006). The conference was attended by over 70 participants from all over the world and provided a unique opportunity for professionals, wheelchair users, service providers, donors, manufacturers and academics to meet and discuss wheelchairs and allied issues.



Consensus Conference on Wheelchairs for Developing Countries, Bangalore, India

The conference also gave participants the chance to review the first draft of new guidelines on the provision of manual wheelchairs in less well resourced settings, which are being developed by WHO in partnership with the International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics (ISPO) and USAID. Several international NGOs, including Motivation, Whirlwind Wheelchair, the Centre for International Rehabilitation and Disabled Peoples International are also taking an active part in developing these guidelines. The guidelines will be presented at the forthcoming ISPO World Congress in Vancouver, Canada, and formally published at a launch event in December 2007.

## Community Based Rehabilitation

### United Nations agencies work with civil society to draw up guidelines for implementing community based rehabilitation programmes

Several United Nations agencies, including WHO, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), are in the process of drafting new guidelines that will provide clear direction on how community based rehabilitation (CBR) initiatives can work to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities and promote respect for their inherent dignity. The work is being done in collaboration with various international NGOs and disabled people's organizations. It is hoped that a draft version of the guidelines will be available for review by the end of 2007. Final publication is scheduled for the end of 2008.



Serge Corrieras / WHO

#### Background to the guidelines

In 1978, recognizing the limitations of existing specialized medical rehabilitation services, WHO introduced its CBR programme to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities through community initiatives. Since then, the CBR concept has evolved and is now widely perceived as being community action to ensure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as all other community members, i.e. equal access to health care, education, skills training and employment, a family life, social mobility and political empowerment.

In 2003, at an international consultation held in Helsinki to review 25 years of CBR, it was agreed that CBR needed to become more holistic in its approach. Greater multisectoral involvement – to facilitate the meeting of basic needs (e.g. for food, shelter, health,

education and livelihood), to reduce poverty, and to ensure community ownership and the active involvement of disabled people and their organizations – is considered pivotal to further development of CBR. The Helsinki consultation was followed, in November 2004, by the publication of a joint WHO/ILO/UNESCO position paper that depicted CBR not simply as a strategy for the rehabilitation and social inclusion of people with disabilities, but as a multisectoral mechanism for reducing poverty, advancing socioeconomic development, and fulfilling national obligations in terms of equal opportunities and human rights.

Building on the recommendations of the CBR position paper, and responding to an expressed need for practical guidance on CBR in the wake of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a core group of experts met in Geneva in December 2006 to lay the foundations for the development of a set of guidelines on CBR. The planned guidelines will follow mainstream multisectoral approaches to ensure the holistic development of CBR in an inclusive society (see Box 2).

#### How will the guidelines be structured?

A CBR “matrix”, which reflects the different sectors that contribute to a holistic CBR strategy, will be used to guide the structure and content of the guidelines. The matrix itself comprises five key components (i.e. health, education, livelihood, social, empowerment), each of which is further divided into five elements. Each of these 25 elements will form the subject of a chapter in the guidelines. The guidelines will also cover topics such as mental health, leprosy, HIV/AIDS and disaster management.

#### Box 2: Community Based Rehabilitation

The objectives of the new CBR guidelines are:

- Inclusion of people with disabilities in the civil, social, political and economic structures of the community.
- Full citizenship and equal opportunities for people with disabilities in the community.

The key strategies for achieving inclusive development are:

- Meeting basic needs (i.e. employment, health and education).
- Involving local government and leaders.
- Social mobilization (involving the whole community).
- Building capacity and empowering people with disabilities, their families and the wider community
- Using the legislation, judicial and political systems to include disability issues in development policies.

## What will the guidelines contain?

The guidelines will recommend strategies for facilitating equal access to health care, education, livelihood opportunities, skills training and employment, for improving personal mobility and for ensuring adequate standards of living and participation in public and cultural life. Selected examples of good evidence-based practice to help practitioners build on the positive experience of others will also be provided.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS



Dr Federico Montero left his position as Coordinator, Disability and Rehabilitation (DAR), on 27 February to return to his home country, Costa Rica. Dr Montero is warmly thanked for his unfailing support and great commitment to WHO's activities during his time with the DAR Team. Dr Etienne Krug, Director of WHO's Violence and Injuries Prevention Department, is currently acting as Coordinator.

## RESOURCES

Access to "[Rehab in Review](#)" now available to all users of the WHO web site

Thanks to the cooperation of Harvard Medical School, you can now view their journal, *Rehab in Review* online. The journal provides concise readable summaries of current, pertinent articles from 70 distinguished journals. The journal is available in three languages: Chinese, English and Spanish.

Contact page: <http://www.rehabinreview.com/contactform.aspx>

Login name: who

Password: rehabwho

### The definition of disability: what is in a name?

Current perceptions about the definition of disability are the subject of an article published in the *Lancet* (see "The definition of disability: what is in a name?", 7 October 2006). Readers can obtain a copy of this article by e-mailing their request to [saiton@who.int](mailto:saiton@who.int).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### June

World Report on Disability and Rehabilitation. 2nd meeting of the Editorial Committee, WHO, Geneva (18-19 June)  
Contact: Alana Officer  
[officera@who.int](mailto:officera@who.int)

### July

[The 12th ISPO World Congress, Vancouver, Canada](#) (29 July – 3 August 2007)  
Contact: Chapal Khasnabis  
[khasnabisc@who.int](mailto:khasnabisc@who.int)

### October

African CBR Congress  
Birchwood Centre, Johannesburg  
South Africa  
(30 October – 2 November 2007).  
Jointly organized by CBR Africa Network and the WHO Regional Office for Africa  
Contact: Olive Kobusingye  
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<http://www.who.int/disabilities>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The DAR Team gratefully acknowledges the generous financial contributions received from the following:

- the Government of Italy;
- the Government of New Zealand;
- the Government of Norway;
- the Government of Sweden;
- the United States Agency for International Development (Leahy War Victims Fund);
- Christoffel-Blindenmission;
- the Italian Association of Friends of Raoul Follereau.