

Information sheet No.4

Rehabilitation Technology Unit RPH Shenton Park Campus



Wheelchair Mobility

A wheelchair is often a consideration for a person with a long term disability. It contributes significantly to the persons medical, vocational, social and recreational welfare.

In the case of disabling conditions such as paraplegia or tetraplegia the wheelchair is essential for mobility and independence. In most instances the wheelchair becomes a part of the persons day to day life and must be correctly prescribed to meet the needs and aspirations of the individual and / or their carer.

Both the client's and the carers' abilities, their goals and functional needs, comfort, safety and environmental demands are among the factors which need to be considered to ensure a successful match between client and wheelchair.

Although the primary reason for prescribing a wheelchair is mobility, it is also a part of providing pressure management and postural seating for function and it can be the platform for a range of assistive devices and Augmentative Communications (AAC) technologies.

The complexity of a person's overall technology need, which increases with the severity of the disability, means that the wheelchair must be prescribed as part of an integrated system, specified to accommodate both the current and the likely future needs of the client.

The Rehabilitation Engineering Clinic (REC) offers the services of experienced staff in rehabilitation engineering, nursing, occupational therapy and technology provision, who can assist to determine a competent specification. They can also undertake assessment as part of the complete process of specifying and providing the wheelchair system to the client.



WHEELCHAIR PROVISION

The REC has a prime responsibility to provide wheelchairs to RPH inpatients for rehabilitation and for their effective return to the community.

Wheelchairs can also be supplied to clients in the community who are eligible for CAEP funding (refer: Info Sheet 2) or privately, on a fee for service basis.

Wheelchairs are provided under the following general principles;

- ◆ *All wheelchairs supplied through the REC are provided on permanent loan to the patient or client.*
- ◆ *Where a wheelchair is no longer needed or where it requires replacement, it must be returned to the REC for renovation or disposal.*
- ◆ *Patients and clients funded through the Hospital or CAEP will be provided the same level and quality of service*
- ◆ *A patient / client may be offered a good quality, renovated wheelchair when appropriate*
- ◆ *Where possible, the individual is offered a choice of wheelchair from a select range of equipment which meets the requirements of Australian Standards, cost effectiveness and competent service support.*

THE RIGHT WHEELCHAIR FOR THE JOB !

Once the need for a wheelchair has been determined, the process of finding the right wheelchair for the individual and their specific needs begins. This can be a confusing and difficult process particularly when there is:

- ◆ constraints on funding
- ◆ a wide range of products available; each with their own unique features
- ◆ a need to interface the wheelchair with a variety of other equipment options ie. pressure management and postural devices

The REC provides a complete service in all areas of wheelchair mobility but particularly in the areas of:

- *Specialised manual wheelchairs (including lightweight and 'heavy duty' wheelchairs)*
- *Electric wheelchairs*
- *Scoters*

This service encompasses assessment, customised modifications, education and training as well as maintenance.

ASSESSMENT

A comprehensive assessment is completed by specialist staff with the client, carer and health professional (as needed). This assessment includes:

- ◆ *determining the basic and essential needs, capabilities and goals of the individual*
- ◆ *arranging consultation with qualified staff in the home or work environment where needed*
- ◆ *evaluating the performance and limitations of the various products and options*
- ◆ *comparing the individual's requirements with the product's merits to achieve an appropriate 'match' given the available funding*
- ◆ *trialing the wheelchair to ensure that it meets the objectives and to optimise the persons performance in the wheelchair*

CUSTOMISED MODIFICATIONS

Customised modifications may be required in any mobility device to accommodate posture, function, or communication equipment. The following examples are typical of the custom modifications which the REC has provided:

Manual Wheelchairs

- ◆ *single piece footplates*
- ◆ *swing away armrests*
- ◆ *set angle backrests*
- ◆ *push handle extensions*

Electric Wheelchairs

- ◆ *alternative control options eg. foot control, sip and puff control, head switches*
- ◆ *swing away electrically operated control brackets*
- ◆ *power tilt and recline*

Alternatively, the REC can design a custom wheelchair from scratch. Often these unique technology solutions are still to be developed and require the expertise of the Rehabilitation Engineer and Technicians to design, fabricate and fit without compromising the integrity or the safety of the wheelchair itself.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

All clients and their carers who receive a wheelchair through the Rehabilitation Engineering Clinic are provided with the necessary training in their use and basic maintenance.

A final 'fitting' occurs to make any adjustments and to ensure the client is comfortable in the wheelchair.

An Occupational Therapist is available to complete training and follow up at the person's home should this be required.

MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

The provision of a wheelchair is only the first part of the service and ongoing maintenance support required for any technology provided. The REC repairs and maintains the wheelchairs which it provides. This is done either on site or coordinated by the Clinic with its various accredited contractors.

for further information on wheelchair mobility , please feel welcome to contact;

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