



Wheelchair provision for people with limb loss

The College of Occupational Therapists (COT) believes that all limbless children and adults in the United Kingdom who require wheelchairs have the right to be provided with chairs which meet their individual needs. People suffering limb loss have very specific requirements and often have multiple needs, requiring assessment by skilled therapists, engineers and technical personnel. As well as assessing clients for the correct wheelchairs, cushions and controls, occupational therapists provide training and opportunity for clients and their carers to practice using wheelchairs safely.

Concerns have been raised recently by our members about new proposals for wheelchair services in England. A new model of provision is proposed, in response to a review of wheelchair services which took place in 2008. Problems highlighted in that review included inequitable distribution of service provision, 'unfair' eligibility criteria in some instances and a low proportion of wheelchair users attending services annually.

COT understands that the new model of provision aims to improve efficiency and appreciates the need to improve wheelchair services generally, but is concerned that to date, it has not been consulted directly about the proposals. Specific questions which COT would like to raise are:-

- How will the new model facilitate joint working amongst clinicians to allow the best care for clients? For example, our members who work with clients with lower limb loss have highlighted the need for them to have rapid access to appropriate wheelchairs and cushions following surgery, to enable mobilisation at the earliest opportunity. What links will the new model have with hospitals to facilitate this?
- Similarly, what will the links be between the wheelchair service and, for example, social services teams, schools, specialised neurological or children's services or generic rehabilitation teams?
- Will the new arrangements be more accessible for wheelchair users than the current system? What will the impact be, for example, on wheelchair users who are frail and/or living alone?
- What will the impact of the new proposals be on the current wheelchair services workforce?

COT believes that any re-design of wheelchair services requires a multi-professional, multi-organisational approach. Full consultation with all professionals, including occupational therapists, who interface with wheelchair services is needed. Re-design also requires thorough consultation with all wheelchair service users. COT would welcome greater involvement in this work.

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