

WHEELCHAIR SKILLS TRAINING FOR EXPERIENCED WHEELCHAIR USERS: TWO CASE COMPARISONS

CHER SMITH, OT¹, ANITA MOUNTAIN, MD², R. LEE KIRBY, MD²

¹Department of Occupational Therapy, Queen Elizabeth Health Sciences Centre, Rehab Centre Site and ²Department of Medicine, Dalhousie University,

Abstract

Although the standard of practice has recently been rising to include wheelchair skills training for new power and manual wheelchair users, individuals who are more experienced are often not receiving the same level of training. This paper presents two case studies of experienced manual wheelchair users.

The first case was that of a 60-year-old man with a 15-year history of T12 complete paraplegia, who sustained an intertrochanteric fracture of his femur, as a result of a tip-over accident while attempting to ascend a curb-pothole combination. The incident occurred two days after a routine follow-up in Spinal Cord Injury Clinic. Eight days following this injury, during a subjective appraisal of his wheelchair skill capabilities, he described his advanced wheelie-dependent skills as being only "fair". During a Wheelchair Skills Test 8 months later, he was unable to perform some relevant advanced obstacle-negotiation skills.^{1, 2}

The second case was that of a 34-year-old woman with spina bifida who had been using a manual wheelchair for several years in combination with ambulation. In the previous two years, she had become dependent upon her wheelchair for most mobility. At an Occupational Therapy appointment for new seating, she was offered a "refresher" course in wheelchair skills since she had not previously received any formal training. After further discussion, the client identified functional goals such as independently taking the garbage out and driving over grass and gravel more easily. The client was surprised to find that, after a series of training sessions, she was capable of performing many advanced obstacle-negotiation skills such as ascending and descending curbs. In follow-up 5 months later, she continued to use many of these new skills to enhance her daily wheelchair mobility.

These cases suggest that inquiries should regularly be made into a client's ability to complete wheelchair skills and preferably observed, as part of the functional assessment, even in experienced wheelchair users. When a wheelchair user's skill level seems less than appropriate, formal training should be offered.^{3, 4}

References

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