WHEELCHAIR SEATING: ARE WE SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE?

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Background

It is sometimes challenging to speak the same language when measuring and prescribing wheelchairs. Many therapists, vendors and researchers are not aware of the International Standards Organization (ISO) and their published standards on Wheelchair Seating Measures. This standards document is complex, long and difficult for any clinician to apply in practice.

In 2011, Kelly Waugh, a physiotherapist was awarded a grant from Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Education Foundation to develop a clinical guide and glossary of terms to accompany the ISO standard. These resources: “A Clinical Application Guide to Standardized Wheelchair Seating Measures of the Body and Seating Support Surfaces” [1] and “Glossary of Wheelchair Terms and Definitions, Version 1.0” [2] is open to the public and is free for anyone to download at this link:


This resource manual defines over 130 measurement terms and includes the correct terminology for angular and linear measurements of the seated person's body and the seating support system. For each term, the guide outlines the purpose of the measure and its clinical relevance, with an accurate definition, a sample measurement procedure, and one to two illustrations helping to visually clarify each measure. This glossary includes a searchable list of 550+ defined terms related to wheelchairs, wheelchair seating, and wheelchair seated posture. Reference sources are included for each term and definition, and historical terms are linked to the preferred term in a comprehensive index.

The intent of this session is to promote the adoption of standardized terms and measures in the field of wheelchair seating. It is important to be familiar and adopt standardized terminology for describing and measuring an individual’s seated posture. Speaking the same language will enhance communication between team members, enable accurate wheelchair prescription and set up of seating products, and allow for appropriate documentation of outcomes related to seated posture in both clinic and research settings. This session will introduce some of the key principles and measures used in a clinical and research setting by two OTs who have implemented some of the guide’s recommendations.

Objectives

Upon completion of the workshop, the participant will:

1. Define the basic linear and angular measures of seated posture and seating support systems that are relevant in clinical practice.
2. Use standardized vocabulary and terminology to describe and quantify posture and dimensions in order to reduce variation in communication between vendors, therapists and researchers.
3. Identify the three key angular body measures and three key relative support surface angles that are crucial in wheelchair prescription and set-up.
4. Synthesize and incorporate core concepts and practical information based on the presenters’ implementation of these standards in an outpatient seating clinic.
5. Review an updated initial seating assessment form that will be standardized across all Toronto Rehab sites.
References


Speaker Bio

Andree Gauthier is an Occupational Therapist working in seating and mobility at Toronto Rehab Institute – University Health Network, Lyndhurst Centre. She has over 20 years of experience working as an OT in acute care, community and is full time in a seating clinic with a focus on individuals with spinal cord injury.

Stephanie Hadi is an Occupational Therapist working in TRI Research at Toronto Rehab Institute – University Health Network, Lyndhurst Centre. Her primary role is local study coordination for an international research study that assesses the risk of developing pressure ulcers in individuals with spinal cord injury. As an OT, she has a role in assessing participants’ posture, wheelchair equipment and also conducts pressure mapping.