

OPENING LINES OF COMMUNICATION: A REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL PROSTHETICS INFORMATION SERVICE PROJECT^a

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The "International Prosthetics Information Service Project" was conducted during the period 1964 to 1966 by the International Society for Rehabilitation of the Disabled using its facilities in New York City, Copenhagen, and Stockholm. The Project was designed to provide for the establishment of an international prosthetics information service which could be effectively used by all countries desiring to improve or develop prosthetic and orthotic services for the physically handicapped. It encompassed the areas of prosthetics, orthotics, technical aids, homemaking for the disabled, community planning, architectural barriers, and transportation.

Implementation.—The primary means employed to carry out the Project were: 1. identifying units where research was being conducted in prosthetics, orthotics, and technical aids; 2. obtaining the cooperation and participation in the Project of such units; 3. purchasing, producing, translating, and otherwise securing and making available publications and films for the widest possible distribution.

Facilities.—The facilities used for the Project were the ISRD Secretariat in New York City; the headquarters of the ISRD's International Committee on Prosthetics and Orthotics and the ISRD International Prosthetics Information Centre in Copenhagen; and the head-

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quarters of the ISRD's International Committee on Technical Aids, Housing and Transportation and ISRD International Information Centre on Technical Aids in Stockholm which included research and demonstration areas as well as administrative offices.

Staffing and Guidance.—In addition to the service of the Project Director and Project Administrator, part-time administrative and clerical assistance was employed in New York City, Copenhagen, and Stockholm.

It should be noted that the Project was conceived as a limited one with expenditures totaling under \$19,000 during each of its three years.

Results.—In seeking to provide for international exchange of information on practice and research in prosthetics and related fields, the Project contributed directly to the following activities:

- a. support for international prosthetics and orthotics courses and seminars;
- b. identification of 71 research centers in 29 countries conducting research in prosthetics, orthotics, and technical aids;
- c. translation and dissemination of reports on prosthetics and orthotics research;
- d. preliminary steps toward publication of an "International Standardized Prosthetics Catalogue";
- e. preparation and publication of an "International Technical Aids Index";
- f. support for translation, preparation, and distribution of *Prosthetics International*, *La Técnica Ortopédica*, *Multi-Lingual Equipment Manual*, *Conversion of Cars for Disabled Drivers*, *Directions for the Preparation of a Guide for Disabled Persons in Towns and Other Built-Up Areas*, *Lists of Literature on Technical Aids, Housing and Transportation*, and various research reports;
- g. Support for loan of ISRD films on prosthetics and related topics, for purchase of films and educational slides for international use, and for international exhibits;
- h. preparation of some 40 articles on prosthetics and related fields for publication in the *International Rehabilitation Review*;
- i. international mailings of special materials on prosthetics, orthotics, and technical aids;
- j. support for experts in research and instruction in prosthetics, orthotics, and technical aids, students and fellows to participate in international prosthetics courses, meetings and seminars, and other exchange activities; and,
- k. development of the ISRD International Committee on Technical Aids, Housing, and Transportation and the ISRD Interna-

tional Information Centre on Technical Aids, which were established during the Project period.

Project Aims.—The Project sought to achieve the following: to collect and disseminate information on research and its application; to coordinate the work of researchers; to encourage standardization; and, to encourage the development of new devices. The Project attempted to complement and enhance the work of the two ISRD Committees and the respective Centres in Copenhagen and Stockholm whenever this contributed to the Project's aims. This was possible because the goals of the three separate programs were related and often congruent. The implications and potential of this methodology are of major significance to the development of new scientific and technical knowledge which will serve to solve problems impeding rehabilitation of disabled persons in many countries.

Observations.—Observations made based upon the Project point up major areas of concern and need calling for attention as follows:

- the provision of information services has been severely limited by a lack of funds;
- developing international standardizations of terminology and systems is possible;
- major obstacles to the dissemination of expert information can be readily identified and means of overcoming them can be developed;
- types of research activities that have proven effective at the international level include comparative surveys and descriptive studies;
- the benefits of international research activities may be more readily identified when conducted within the framework of an organized research or demonstration project;
- specific research problems and needs in developed nations may be identified which, through cooperative research, can yield opportunities for the development and improvement of services;
- standards and goals for international services as well as means of evaluating services can be developed;
- development or improvement of international information services calls for accurate determination of needs of users of information in the field, particularly for workers in developing nations;
- developing nations can use the research findings of the developed nations, adopting or adapting the techniques and methods as required;
- information services for developing nations are needed to enhance the establishment of local, national, and regional centers

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and libraries which serve health, social, and other agencies concerned with the disabled as well as rehabilitation workers.

Findings.—Findings resulting from the Project are as follows:

- centers or services conducting research on prosthetics, orthotics, and technical aids can be identified throughout the world and their cooperation in international exchange can be enlisted;
- international standardizations of equipment, devices, and materials in prosthetics, orthotics, and technical aids is possible and international indexes and catalogues have been developed;
- national and local experiences in the provision of prosthetics, orthotics, and technical aids service can be synthesized and published for global use in various forms of communications media;
- researchers and instructors in prosthetics, orthotics, and technical aids can function effectively in cross-cultural assignments identifying research and service needs.

Recommendations.—Recommendations for the development of international prosthetics, orthotics, and technical aids information services are:

Information

- governmental and non-governmental organizations should increase support for international information and education activities which will assure optimal exchange of scientific and technical information;
- support should be increased internationally for professional exchange of personnel, i.e., experts, consultants, researchers, and fellows;

Research

- support should be given for the expansion of international research activities including international comparative and cooperative research;

Service

- global planning is called for in order to increase or improve the provision of international services;
- in the provision of international services, methods should be developed to determine needs, set standards, and evaluate results;

Developing Nations

- in general, assignment of higher priority and increased attention should be given to meeting the needs of workers in developing nations.

Closing Comment.—The premise that technical cooperation and assistance can be provided in a wide range of subject areas is generally ac-

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cepted, but the feasibility and value of such service in each new or untried area must be proven. The Project has demonstrated the effectiveness of international cooperation in international information and research activities in prosthetics, orthotics, and technical aids, and the feasibility of organizing internationally to study and develop solutions for problems in the rehabilitation of disabled persons which exist in one or several countries. The results of these activities are now available to rehabilitation workers seeking to compare services or to improve methods of serving clients.

The overriding conclusion to be drawn from the Project is that direct client service can be enhanced through the provision of effective international information and research exchange services.

The major needs identified by the Project are for more governmental and non-governmental support to increase and expand existing services, particularly for developing nations.