

EDITOR'S NOTE

Wheelchair selection used to be a simple process of prescribing essentially the same chair, modified only by an individual's measurements. However, advances in research and technology have changed that and a wide choice of chairs, seating options, and accessories have created the need for a *system of selection*. Each person can now be equipped with a wheelchair tailored specifically to his or her needs and lifestyle.

Proper selection is essential. An appropriately prescribed chair can increase mobility, provide the opportunity to participate in sports, and expand employment opportunities. Proper selection results in improved health and quality of life.

Progress made in the range of choice has been so dramatic and so rapid that a wide gap now exists between the available technology and clinical practice. Having choices offers us the opportunity for a successful match between user and wheelchair. It also increases our chance for error. The possible consequences of an improperly prescribed chair include pressure sores, thrombosis, and spinal deformity as well as unnecessary limitations on mobility and lifestyle.

This gap is costly in other ways. The VA alone spent over \$18,000,000 in 1988 for prescription wheelchairs (including repairs). A more effective use of technology would save significant dollars while providing better service. A proper initial prescription would reduce the number of replacements made because of improperly-fitted chairs. It would also cut maintenance costs, thereby effecting an overall decrease in the cost of prescription chairs.

This book details the prescription considerations for individuals with physical disabilities. It is presented in a multiple author format, representing a team approach to wheelchair selection.

Section I, *Clinical Perspectives on Wheelchair Selection*, emphasizes the philosophy that wheelchair selection is an inclusive process—the consumer working in conjunction with a professional team, choosing from a wide range of components to meet the requirements of various settings (work, leisure, travel, recreation).

The second section, *Technical Considerations*, examines the technical aspects of seat selection, factors that affect the ergonomics of wheelchair operation, and the influence of powered mobility.

Section III, *Future Developments*, reviews the Wheelchair Standards, as defined by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), examines current research, and includes *A Call for Action*, which delineates the need for a national clearinghouse for all information related to rehabilitation research and technology.

The importance of a properly prescribed wheelchair system cannot be overestimated. A wheelchair tends to become a part of the self and self-image of the user. All clinical team members as well as the client and his or her family members are obliged to be well informed and take an active role in the selection process. This book provides guidelines to that end.

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