

# THE WHO NEWSLETTER ON DISABILITY AND REHABILITATION

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The World Health Organization (WHO) disability and rehabilitation newsletter is produced three times a year and distributed via e-mail. Subscription/unsubscription requests should be sent to WHO's Disability and Rehabilitation Team (DAR) at the following e-mail address: [pedersenr@who.int](mailto:pedersenr@who.int)

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## Task Force on Disability update

In 2008, Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General (DG) created a Task Force on Disability. The end of the first year of Task Force work was marked by the delivery of a report to the DG on progress. A successful seminar series, access audits of WHO headquarters and several regional offices, and progress on removing barriers to employment in the Organization are among the highlights. In the photo below, one of the access improvements implemented in the HQ Executive Board room is illustrated by a member of the audit team. This room has also been fitted with a hearing loop and lifts for translators that use wheelchairs. Further, improvements are planned.



Wheelchair user seated at Executive Board room table.

Year two will focus on mainstreaming disability in the technical work. For example a forthcoming WHO conference on physical activity and obesity will have a panel devoted to people with disabilities, and a new guidance note promoting sexual and reproductive health for persons with disabilities will soon be launched.

## World report: make it personal!

A personal touch is being added to the *World report on disability and rehabilitation* (see previous newsletters for more information) with the inclusion of first hand experiences of disability as it relates to the main topics covered in the report: access to health care and rehabilitation; personal assistance and informal care; physical and information environments; education; and employment. These stories provide an opportunity for people with disabilities all over the world to contribute. Brief quotations will be dispersed throughout the chapters in order to provide real-life illustrations of issues in the report. Longer narratives will be included in the section of the WHO website dedicated to the report which will be unveiled when the report is launched in 2010.

**How you can contribute:** we particularly need accounts from developing countries and from smaller nations. Comments ranging from 100-200 words are welcome, or longer stories of up to 500 words for the website. If you have examples of personal narratives, whether they are positive or negative stories, please send them to Rachel Pedersen ([pedersenr@who.int](mailto:pedersenr@who.int)).

## UN Convention update

The United States of America is the latest country to sign the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) making a total of 142 signatories to the CRPD and 85 to the Optional Protocol. 64 countries have ratified the Convention and 42 have ratified the Optional Protocol.

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## WHO Global Strategy on Leprosy

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A Global Leprosy Programme Managers' Meeting held at WHO's Regional Office for South-East Asia in New Delhi in April 2009, decided that the new global target for leprosy would be ***“Reduction of the rate of new cases with grade-two disabilities per 100,000 population by at least 35% by the end of 2015, compared to the baseline at the beginning of 2011”***. Achieving this target means detecting leprosy early, before nerve damage develops.

The new strategy has also strengthened its focus on tackling leprosy-related disability and discrimination through:

- ♦ support for the human rights of people affected by leprosy and respect for their inherent dignity;
- ♦ advocacy for more dignifying terminology whenever discussing people affected by leprosy;
- ♦ more holistic assessments of the needs of each person affected by leprosy and provision of appropriate support under community-based rehabilitation.

Delegates included over 40 National Leprosy Programme Managers from around the world as well as members of the WHO Technical Advisory Group for Leprosy, authoritative experts from the international NGO sector, including organizations of those affected by leprosy. This multi-sectoral involvement exemplifies WHO's consultative approach, which has helped foster ownership of the strategy by all who will be involved in its implementation up to 2015. “A world without leprosy” remains the long-term vision of all partners.



*Tiexi Ma, who has been affected by Leprosy, has contributed his story to the World Report*

### Role of persons affected by leprosy

The Enhanced Global Strategy highlights the important roles played by persons affected by leprosy in leprosy services, especially in the area of advocacy, awareness, and rehabilitation. These include:

- promoting more positive attitudes to the disease among the public;
- changing discriminatory laws;
- ensuring that leprosy control continues to occupy an important place in the health policy framework of the country.

### Importance of Human rights.

The Enhanced Global Strategy refers to the CRPD. The Convention's focus on inclusive development is critically important for pursuing the rights of persons affected by leprosy.

A milestone noted by the Strategy was the unanimous approval by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2008 of a Resolution on the “Elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members”. Guidelines to help implement this Resolution, and thereby improve the quality of life of people affected by leprosy, are now being formulated.

### Importance of CBR

The Enhanced Global Strategy also calls for the integration of leprosy rehabilitation with broader CBR, which has been an increasingly important focus in WHO's collaborative work with the International Federation of Anti Leprosy Associations (ILEP). The *WHO/ILEP Technical Guide on CBR and Leprosy* (2008) has been translated into Spanish and Portuguese and will shortly be available in French and Chinese. It provides a useful re-orientation tool for staff in leprosy control programmes responsible for CBR, and may also be used by CBR managers to include people affected by leprosy in their programmes.

Leprosy cannot yet be eradicated. With around 250,000 people being detected each year, much remains to be done, both to prevent disability but also to ensure that affected persons are included in development

programmes, and that discrimination and stigma are challenged.

*Submitted by Douglas Soutar, General Secretary, ILEP*

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## 50 years of collaboration: WFOT and WHO

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27 October 2009 marks Occupational Therapy International Day and the celebration of 50 years of collaboration between the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) and WHO.

From the beginning of its collaboration, WFOT has been actively involved in supporting the strategic objectives and activities of WHO, as well as promoting occupational therapy and the occupational therapy profession globally. WFOT and the WHO DAR Team are currently working on a four year work plan that runs until 2012 and emphasizes human rights and the rights of persons with disabilities as a focus of action.

As part of this work plan WFOT has made significant contributions to the *World report on disability and rehabilitation* and the *CBR Guidelines*. Over the next three years WFOT will contribute to the development of a rehabilitation matrix and a generic curriculum on rehabilitation from a human rights perspective and will support WHO to mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities into our work on disasters.

'WFOT - committed to improving health globally' will be the theme of the celebrations between WFOT Executives and WHO at the WHO headquarters in Geneva. This day will feature collaborative meetings, a lunchtime seminar on the contribution of occupational therapy to the global health agenda, a workshop on reasonable accommodations and a commemorative ceremony.

*Submitted by Kit Sinclair, WFOT Ambassador*



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## Occupational Therapy: the difference between life and living

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HIV affects families and is increasingly seen as a disability issue, both as an example of people living with long term health conditions, but also the issues of informal care that the pandemic raises. In a deprived area near Cape Town, South Africa, grandmothers of children orphaned by AIDS established a community-based support programme and named themselves GAPA, Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS. The project brings together distressed women through a familiar occupation: patchwork quilting. It began when a research project by the Albertina and Walter Sisulu Institute of Ageing in Africa at the University of Cape Town sponsored an intervention programme for grandmothers who were affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Participants wanted to continue the activities when the research project ended, so they formed a committee with an occupational therapist (OT). Occupational therapists help people do everyday tasks which enable them to sustain themselves and contribute to the wider community



*GAPA members showing toys and a dress that they made for sale*

The participants were aged between 50 and 75 years: lacking education, they had to eke out a living doing menial tasks. A modest pension for those over 60 years had become the only income in these multigenerational households. Some grandmothers younger than 60 years had to give up employment to care for sick or orphaned children. Together with the extra expense of medicines,

hospitals and funerals, this plunged them into often overwhelming poverty. These women were bewildered by a disease they could not understand or ask questions about because of the taboo on the subject, and were subjected to enormous stress as a result.

### **Occupational therapy intervention**

Workshops were run by the occupational therapist with facilitators from local NGOs. Topics covered included HIV/AIDS, home care and grants, stigmatization, arthritis, nutrition, business skills, disaster relief, bereavement, gardening, and human rights.

The OT provided a safe non-threatening atmosphere which fostered communication among the participants. Together with the sewing activities, the grandmothers discussed mutual problems related to their orphaned grandchildren, found solutions, and provided support for each other. From one small group in 2001, the project has expanded in 2009 to 25 groups that generate incomes and provide peer psychosocial support. GAPA projects include monthly workshops for grandmothers, community-based support and income generation groups, preschool bursaries for orphaned grandchildren, an aftercare for the community's vulnerable primary school children and a health club for grandmothers over 60 years. There are now GAPA groups in the Eastern Cape and Tanzania. ([www.gapa.org.za](http://www.gapa.org.za)) Submitted by Kit Sinclair, WFOT Ambassador



*GAPA members quilting*

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## **Rehab in Review**

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*Rehab in Review* is a surveillance journal created by physicians in physical medicine and rehabilitation. This journal was created to assist other physicians with the task of keeping abreast of current medical literature. Since its creation over 15 years ago, universities in the United States have collaborated to scan the available literature in order to summarize important articles for those who treat individuals with disabilities. Now among the most widely read publications among rehabilitation physicians in the United States, the academic mission of this journal has expanded to other countries and other academic societies.

Over the past two years, the founders of *Rehab in Review* have been collaborating with WHO to distribute this journal to those who treat people with disability throughout the world. Readers of the disability and rehabilitation newsletter can access the journal and read summaries of articles chosen from among over 100 medical journals focusing on neurologic as well as musculoskeletal topics:

[www.rehabinreview.com/whologin.aspx](http://www.rehabinreview.com/whologin.aspx)

Login name: who

Password: rehabwho

We invite you to visit the website and become acquainted with this tool which reviews the best available medical literature for rehabilitation professionals.

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## **New interns arrive!**

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During June and July, DAR benefitted from the contribution of Sofija Korac, an intern studying at the Fletcher School, Tufts University. Sofija, who originates from Serbia, worked on gathering personal narratives and on mainstreaming disability in physical activity and rehabilitation. During the summer, Natalie Jessup, an Australian occupational therapist, has also been volunteering her services to support the completion of the *CBR Guidelines*.



*Intern Sofija Korac contributes to the Access Audit of WHO's headquarters building.*

DAR is grateful to Sofija and Natalie for their hard work. We were delighted to hear that Veronica Umeasiegbu, a former intern, has been accepted onto a PhD programme, and that Bliss Temple, another previous colleague, got married in May. Congratulations to them both! We welcome applications from future interns, particularly people with disabilities. Should you be interested, please send an email to [pedersenr@who.int](mailto:pedersenr@who.int).

## Upcoming events

- ♦ **2-4 September 2009:** Second meeting of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. New York: [www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1479](http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1479)
- ♦ **19-23 October 2009:** Second meeting of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Geneva, Switzerland: [www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Meetings.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Meetings.aspx)
- ♦ **27 October 2009:** Occupational Therapy International Day and celebration of 50 years of collaboration between WFOT and WHO
- ♦ **6-8 November 2009:** The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Symposium on Communication Disorders in Multi-cultural Populations, Argos, Cyprus: [www.ialp.info](http://www.ialp.info)
- ♦ **3 December 2009: International Day of Persons with Disabilities:** theme "Realizing the MDGs for All: Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities and Their Communities around the World".
- ♦ **4-7 May 2010:** 15<sup>th</sup> WFOT World Congress: Sharing the World of Occupation from Latin America, Santiago, Chile: [wfot.org/wfot2010/](http://wfot.org/wfot2010/)
- ♦ **23-27 May 2010:** 17<sup>th</sup> ESPRM Congress: "European Rehabilitation: Quality, Evidence, Efficacy and Effectiveness", Venice, Italy: [www.cesprm2010.eu/index.html](http://www.cesprm2010.eu/index.html)
- ♦ **2-4 June 2010:** 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Mobility and Transport for Elderly and Disabled Persons (TRANSED 2010), Hong Kong [www.transed2010.hk/](http://www.transed2010.hk/)

### More information

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