
E5: The Wheelchair Skills Program (WSP): An evidence-based program for the assessment and training of wheelchair skills

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Learning objectives:

At the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the development and underlying framework supporting the WSP.
2. Describe the rationale and evidence supporting wheelchair skills assessment and training.
3. Demonstrate ability to administer the Wheelchair Skills Test.
4. Explain the influence of wheelchair skills on participation.

Session description:

The wheelchair is an important form of assistive technology that can enable mobility and social participation for individuals with mobility limitations. However, acquisition of a wheelchair alone does not ensure safe or efficient use. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes the critical importance of assessment and training as part of optimal wheelchair service provision, a position well supported by evidence.

The Wheelchair Skills Program (WSP), established by Dr. Lee Kirby at Dalhousie University (Halifax, Canada), comprises assessment (Wheelchair Skills Test (WST)) and training (Wheelchair Skills Training Program (WSTP)) tools that may meet the wheelchair service provision needs for assessment and training. There is scientific evidence supporting the WST and WSTP for manual wheelchair, power wheelchair and scooter skills in device users, caregivers, and clinicians in institutional and community-based settings. The current version of the WSP (version 4.3.3) is a result of more than 20 years of development. The WSP material is freely accessible online at (www.wheelchairskillsprogram.ca).

In 2004, a representative of the WHO described the WSP as 'low tech, high-impact'. According to the WHO's International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health, wheelchair skills are foundational 'activities' that are necessary for enabling social and community 'participation' among wheelchair users and their caregivers. Therefore, wheelchair skills training may enable users to overcome environmental barriers and thus permit wheelchair users to fulfill desired societal roles. Other potential benefits of wheelchair-skills training include fewer accidents and injuries, an improved sense of wellbeing (i.e., through self-esteem, self-efficacy, personal control, and empowerment), and reduced burden on caregivers.

The purpose of this workshop is to provide attendees with an overview of the development of the WSP and foundational training in the standardized administration of assessment (WST) and training (WSTP) tools.

Content references:

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