

Gaining International Agreement on Best Practice Guidelines

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Over the last 30 years international standards have been developed for the mechanical and engineering-oriented items that PMG members use day-by-day. This approach of concentrating on the technical side of provision hankers back to the pre-McColl days (pre-1986) of centralised DSCs (Disablement Services Centres) run by Technical Officers with little or no qualified clinical input to assessment and provision. The knock-on from this is that procurement officers look at assistive technology as a commodity, and decisions are made around price rather than function.

Modern posture and mobility practice looks at an individual and assesses the need, and appropriate solutions are prescribed. However, providing the best diagnosis and the best solutions can take years of experience, and for newcomers it can be difficult to know where to turn for the best advice. In addition, seasoned practitioners may not always have all the relevant information at their fingertips. There is, as a result, an identified need to produce Best Practice Guidelines (BPGs) to which practitioners are able to refer in order to help find solutions to challenging clinical problems. Such guidelines would be all the more robust where they have been agreed not just nationally, but internationally, and this was the aim for the International Conference, sponsored by SPMN (Scottish Posture and Mobility Network), BSRM (British Society of Rehabilitation Medicine) and PMG, in Glasgow in 2010.

Working Groups, with contributors from the UK, Ireland, mainland Europe, North America, and Australia, tackled a dozen topics in the two years before the conference, and presented the results of their efforts in workshops where the attendees could be trained on the outcomes of the work, and feedback provided to the contributors.

The aim was that these BPGs should be living documents placed in the public domain where professionals could comment on them, leading to revisions every 5 to 10 years as practice developed. Difficulties were experienced with finding a suitable host for the documents but since then, PMG made some developments to their website, and this is where they have started to be placed.

The success of this exercise can be measured by the fact that the first BPG set up, BPG1 on transportation, is now considered by many to be the gold standard in the field, and the MHRA has withdrawn their guidelines in preference (or dereference) to BPG1.

The push is now that these Practice Guidelines be adopted as International Standards, and the first of these, the Interface Pressure Mapping BPG, will be published later this year as an ISO technical report, ISO TR 16840-9.