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## National Clinical Guidelines for Specialised Wheelchair Seating (April 2004)

The British Society of Rehabilitation Medicine launched its National Clinical Guidelines for Specialised Wheelchair Seating at the Posture and Mobility Group Conference in Nottingham on 2 April.

- Specialised Wheelchair Seating is a relatively new service that is often poorly understood, and haphazardly commissioned. These Guidelines offer some definitions in order to improve understanding and provide a clear framework for commissioning and delivering these services in order to improve outcome.
- Within the cohort of people who depend on a wheelchair for their mobility, are a smaller group, who, without specialised wheelchair seating can neither be comfortable nor function optimally.

In the words of the mother of an 18 year old who is dependent on specialised wheelchair seating:

*"Imagine spending 18 hours a day in the same pair of shoes; the same pair for the house, for going shopping, for walking the dog. Imagine if those shoes were for a growing child; you would of course ensure that they fitted well, were comfortable, preferably aesthetically appealing and ideally you'd have a choice. You would also of course ensure that as the child grew, the shoes still met those criteria! As a parent of a child with severe physical disabilities the need for expertly fitted special seating is vital. My daughter Sarah more than anything needs to be comfortable so that she can actually endure long spells in her chair; she needs to be seated well so that we can attempt to prevent deformities (which means less time spent in hospitals having corrective surgery). She needs to be able to access equipment to help her interact with the environment and socialise with her friends. She needs people to remember that she is a person with feelings, not a statistic or a cost implication."*

- As more people survive either at birth, or from accidents or illnesses later in life, so the number of people with disabilities rises and this is reflected in the increasing numbers requiring specialised wheelchair seating.
- Urgent investment is needed, not only in terms of specialised wheelchair seating services, but also research to quantify the need and the benefits of provision. It is hoped that these guidelines may stimulate the start of that process.

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