

Wheelchair Supplement Foreword

The dominant themes of the ISPO Journal, Prosthetics and Orthotics International are, naturally, of prosthetic and orthotic subjects. The interests of ISPO, however, extend beyond these two subjects into other areas of Rehabilitation Engineering. This is not always reflected in the content of the Journal, possibly because workers in these areas submit to other journals and may be less productive of written articles. This issue and others attempt to redress this imbalance by including a series of papers concentrating on wheelchair and seating related topics. The papers result from 'Dundee 88', a conference on wheelchairs and seating.

Hopefully the appearance of such a concentration of wheelchair and seating papers will encourage people to submit papers on a wider range of topics and thus improve the under-developed nature of publication in Rehabilitation Engineering.

Tayside Rehabilitation Engineering Services at Dundee Limb Fitting Centre have a history of organising international conferences every three years on the "state of the art" of specific prosthetic and orthotic topics. The heat of a memorable ISPO World Congress in Copenhagen, 1986, spawned the idea of a departure of Dundee Conferences from prosthetic and orthotic topics to seating and wheelchairs. The established Dundee format was envisaged using invited experts to present the current state of clinical knowledge and practice. Workshop sessions and an exhibition would give opportunities for the exchange of information and expertise at a more practical and information level. There would be a social programme!

At the time, this was seen as a brave and possibly foolhardy, idea as there was no precedent for seating and wheelchair topics to attract an international audience for the planned period of one week. The spectre of a large auditorium sparsely populated by an audience of 20 to 30 invited speakers alone loomed large in the organisers' minds.

These fears proved to be groundless as the conference was fully subscribed with over 300 participants. I believe a useful and enjoyable week was had by all. Many lessons were learnt, not just from the words of wisdom of the speakers but also concerning the high level of interest and thirst for knowledge about seating and wheelchairs.

Prior to the conference, a publication had been planned, not simply based upon its proceedings, but written as a definitive work in its own right. This has resulted in two series of papers, one relating to wheelchairs which is presented in this issue and one relating to seating which is to be presented in a subsequent issue.

The wheelchair topics of this issue include mechanical and biomechanical treatments of wheelchair designs both of an occupant and attendant propelled nature. Interest in occupant propulsion is well established particularly for the athletic paraplegic. Attendant propulsion has been neglected in the past and consequently a review of the current UK provision of pushchairs and its limitations is included.

The practical considerations of wheelchairs are much neglected in their importance. The transportation by vehicle of wheelchair users in their wheelchairs is a daily occurrence but is potentially very hazardous in the event of a crash. Rather than adopt the usual ostrich "head in the sand" approach to this problem, an Australian Standard has tackled it "head on" and is described in the final paper.

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Guest Editor