



Rehabilitation – strengthening advocacy for change. It’s time to act

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It is well known that access to rehabilitation services at the primary health care (PHC) level has historically been limited with most rehabilitation interventions based at tertiary and secondary levels of care. Policy developments such as the National Rehabilitation Policy¹ highlight the need for the expansion of rehabilitation services across all levels of care, while improving access for all persons with disability requiring rehabilitation services. More recent strategic policy directives such as Primary Health Care Re-engineering², the Framework and Strategy for Disability and Rehabilitation Services in South Africa³ and the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities⁴ position rehabilitation services as an integral part in the delivery of integrated and comprehensive health care that is grounded within the core tenets of community based rehabilitation (CBR) and social justice.

With the combination of an ageing population and the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases, it is likely that more people will present with functional limitations and thus the possibility of ageing with a disability^{5,6}. Conversely, with the growing economic crisis in South Africa, poverty and unemployment present significant challenges to vulnerable groups, in particular those with mental health concerns. Rehabilitation is therefore “poised to become the key health strategy of the 21st century”^{6,7}. These global trends should undoubtedly prompt greater investment in rehabilitation as a critical health strategy for the future⁶.

In recognition of the need for dialogue and collaboration with other rehabilitation professionals and stakeholders, the growing concerns raised by members of the Occupational Therapy Association of South Africa (OTASA) and the recent Life Esidimeni tragedy, the Association hosted a Collaborative Indaba on Rehabilitation with the intention to map out strategies that could potentially have greater impact on the issues related to rehabilitation. The intentions and outcomes of the Indaba are to foster greater interprofessional and intersectoral collaboration; galvanise efforts to gather evidence for health and rehabilitation outcomes; strengthen a collective voice for the plight of disability and rehabilitation as well as work alongside persons with all disabilities and their families to advocate for social justice. In this SAJOT issue we present the position statement on Rehabilitation which conveys OTASA’s official stand point on Rehabilitation^a.

Despite the growing awareness of the important role that rehabilitation, and in particular occupational therapy, can play in addressing the challenges that present themselves in every facet of society, the question remains: How do we as a country and profession respond to these challenges?

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^a Please note that the version published in the previous issue of the SAJOT is incorrect. The version in this issue is the official position of the OTASA.

