

Fact Sheet 4

Lightweight Wheelchairs

Justification for light-weight wheelchairs for people with Muscular Dystrophy and Allied Neuromuscular Conditions

Unfortunately, lightweight wheelchairs have become associated with sport and their value for people with muscle weakness has not been fully appreciated. There is no doubt, that lightweight wheelchairs are easier to propel and are more manoeuvrable due to their larger wheels, the fact that the wheel can be adjusted to the optimum position for each user, and the advantageous camber of the wheels. In fact, the advantages that the disabled sportsman gains are shared by people with restricted power in their arms.

A lightweight wheelchair will not only be easier to propel with the result that someone with MD or a neuromuscular condition can travel faster, but because less effort is involved in both propelling and manoeuvring the chair, the user will be able to sustain the effort for much longer. Tiredness is a well recognised feature of MD and other neuromuscular conditions, and contributes to the very restricted lifestyle of many people with these conditions, and they have to plan their days very carefully to make the best use of their strength.

In many cases, their need of a lightweight wheelchair is much greater than that of other disabled users with non-degenerative conditions who have no restriction in their upper limb strength. In addition, the supply of a lightweight wheelchair often delays the provision of a powered wheelchair and provides additional grounds in which they can be justified.

There are many Wheelchair Centres around the country who have supplied Remploy Rollers, Carters Activ, Suntecs, Quickie and many other lightweight models. If further justification for the supply needs to be substantiated, a speed test should be provided for the person concerned. They should be timed on a straight run and manoeuvring around obstacles in both lightweight wheelchairs and standard NHS chair and the difference in functional ability is likely to be very marked.

It is encouraging to find that since the increased involvement of therapists and user groups in the Wheelchair Service, that there is a more individual and forward-thinking approach to the prescription and supply of wheelchairs.

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