International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)

Introduction

What is the ICF?

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) provides a standard language and framework for describing and organizing information on functioning and disability.

The ICF conceptualizes a person's level of functioning as a dynamic interaction between her or his health conditions, environmental factors, and personal factors.

Components of functioning and environmental factors are classified in the ICF; diseases and other health problems are classified in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD). The ICF was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and was endorsed by the World Health Assembly in May 2001.

Components of the ICF

The ICF defines functioning and disability as multi-dimensional concepts relating to:

- The body functions and structures of people

- The activities people do and the life areas in which they participate; and

- The factors in their environment that affect these experiences.

For each of these components, the ICF provides a hierarchy of classifications and codes. In the ICF, a person's functioning is conceived as a dynamic interaction between health conditions and environmental and personal factors (Figure 1a). An illustration using cerebral palsy as an example is at figure 1b.

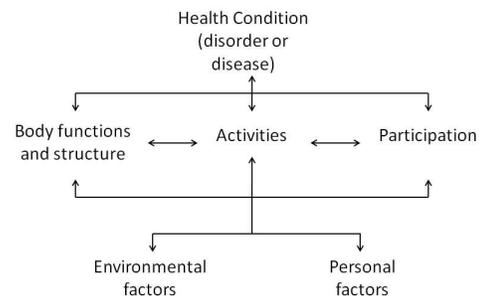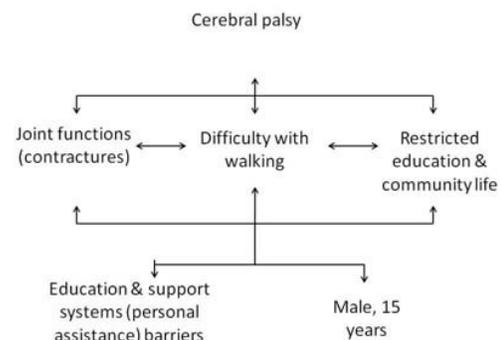Figure 1a Interaction between ICF components

Figure 1b Illustration of functioning associated with cerebral palsy

Source: World Health Organization 2001. International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. Geneva:WHO.

ICF definitions
- the **body functions and structures**, and **impairments** thereof (functioning at the level of the body);

- the **activities** a person performs and the **activity limitations** he or she experiences (functioning at the level of the individual);

- the **participation** or involvement of a person in all areas of life, and the **participation restrictions** the person experiences (functioning of a person as a member of society); and

- the **environmental factors** which affect these experiences (and whether these factors are facilitators or barriers).

Qualifiers

Qualifiers are numeric values recorded after a relevant domain code, to indicate the extent of 'problem' with that aspect of functioning. A uniform or 'generic' qualifier (5-point) scale is provided to record the extent of the impairment, activity limitation and participation restriction. The environmental factors qualifier uses both a positive and negative scale, to indicate the extent to which an environmental factor acts as either a facilitator or barrier to functioning.

Value of using ICF

The ICF provides a universally applicable framework and language to advance the development of policies and services to meet the needs of people with disabilities. The needs of children with disabilities are captured using the ICF version for children and youth (ICF-CY).

The ICF:

- recognises the role of environmental factors in the creation of disability and the importance of participation as a desired outcome, as well as underlying health conditions;

- is in tune with current trends towards a greater focus on long-term health and functional outcomes in the health and community services fields;

- presents an overarching conceptual framework for the development and analysis of joined up data to support a wide range of government policies;

- incorporates key concepts from a wide range of fields relating to human functioning, and offers an extensive menu from which concepts and items can be selected for the design of information systems, or for targeted clinical or research applications; and

- provides detailed hierarchical sets of codes to assist in the collection of data.

Applications of ICF

The ICF provides a framework for the description of human functioning on a continuum. It classifies functioning, not people. Because the development and testing of the ICF involved people from a broad range of backgrounds and disciplines, including people with disability, the ICF has a wide range of potential applications.

The ICF is used across broad sectors including health, disability, rehabilitation, community care, insurance, social security, employment, education, economics, social policy, legislation and environmental design and modification.

Tools to get started

An online browser [http://www.who.int/classifications/icfbrowser] includes all ICF codes and definitions in six languages as well as the ICF-CY.

The ICF: an overview [http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/icfapptraining/ en/index.html] is an introduction to the ICF available from the WHO website.

The *Training Manual on Disability Statistics* [www.unescap.org/stat/**disability**/**manual**/index.asp] describes the use of the ICF in surveys, censuses and administrative data collections.

An interactive web-based education course [http://p.ideaday.de/104.2/icf/] introduces users to the ICF, provides examples and exercises to test your knowledge about the ICF.

The WHO-DAS 2 [http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/whodasii/en/in dex.html] is available in short (12 item) and longer (36 item) versions for both self-report and interview administration.

For more information

http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/ or email icf@who.int

This document has been produced by the *WHO Family of International Classifications Network* [http://www.who.int/classifications/en/].

.