

The Development of Rehabilitation Services in the Asia-Oceania Region

From a global perspective, the significant prevalence of disability has resulted in a continuing and increased demand for rehabilitation services. This has been attributed to: an aging population, an augmented risk of disability within older populations and overall increases in chronic diseases. Current estimates project that of 1 billion individuals who have disability, rehabilitation can benefit approximately 92% and reduce the burden of disease. Yet, there remains an unbalanced availability of rehabilitation services to accommodate current needs, particularly within low-middle economic areas.

The Asia-Oceania Region, has seen a gradual evolution of Rehabilitation Medicine since 1948; including associated societies, programs and facilities. Whilst the Region accounts for 60% of the world's population; there is a limited availability of rehabilitation allied professionals. In some Asian countries, this has been translated to 0.5 workers per 10,000 residents.

Within the Region, there are recognised disparities in Rehabilitation Programs in terms of the stage of development (with Western countries rehabilitating Veterans since World War II and Asia, Europe and the United States adopting the discipline at a later stage). There are also variations in training, research priority areas and treatment modalities. Japan leads the development of robotics in physical rehabilitation whilst China integrates traditional Chinese practices with Western medicine. However, the mainstay of treatment remains relatively consistent – to improve activity limitation and participation for individuals.

To maintain cohesion in the Region and to develop the specialty; the formation of regional societies has been pivotal. It has also enabled the Region to address current service gaps; by the introduction of tele-rehabilitation services for individuals within rural areas.

Moving forward, the World Report on Disability provides a template to evolve the services delivered in all countries and influence Government action and investment in the continued demands for the discipline.