Disability: Models of disability.
NID Training Disability Diary

- Compiled by Dr Jean Mitchell

Introduction

A model is a tool that is used to define an issue and formulate strategies to meet certain needs that result from the issue. It can provide a framework in which governments and society can work to gain useful knowledge that can be applied in dealing with something like disability. Models of disability give us an insight into societal attitudes, pre-conceptions and prejudices and expose how governments and society create or restrict medical, social and educational opportunities. While there are many models of disability (Retief & Letšosa, 2018), three seem to be the most influential, namely the Medical, Social and Biopsychosocial Models. These models are different from each other, but each has value.

Discussion

Two central philosophies influence the models. The first philosophy, that gives rise to the Medical Model of disability, regards the disability or reduced function of a person as the most important. They see a disability as something that can be corrected or cured through the application of professional medical care. In addition, it regards disabled people as being dependent on society. This model is sometimes regarded as being undesirable because it can lead to stereotyping and stigmatisation of disabled people (Grey, Lydon & Healy, 2016). The second philosophy, that gives rise to the Social Model of disability, places the person first and regards disability as a social, cultural and environmental issue that impacts an individual's life (Rees, 2017). This model separates the disability from the individual and sees disability as being created by social barriers that exaggerate the effects of a disability (WHO, 2012).

On their own, each of the above models is valid, but inadequate. The 'Human Rights' approach to disability has given rise the Biopsychosocial Model that is a practicable compromise between the supporters of the medical and social models (WHO, 2012). Using this approach, the WHO has developed the International Classification of Functioning that provides a framework for the description of health and health-related conditions. This framework stresses that environmental factors are fundamental to understanding disability.

Conclusion

Disabilities affect individuals who need to be enabled to be as independent as possible so that they can contribute to society. Society must take acknowledge that people are different and should create empowering education and employment environments to facilitate their success.

The ICF Model of functioning and disability
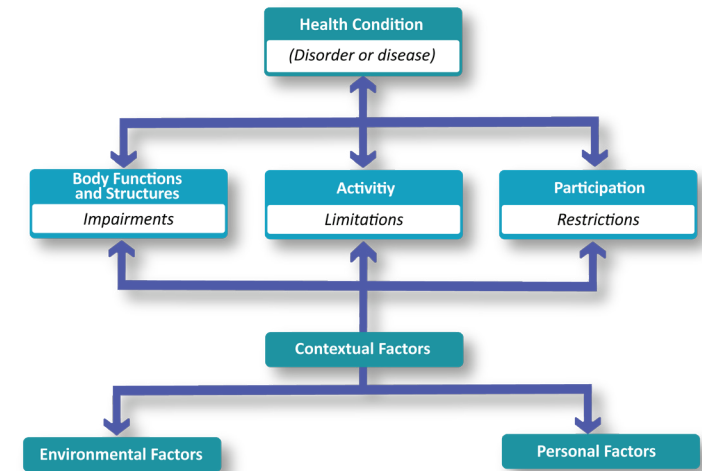
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