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The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health: Contemporary Literature Overview

This article reviews the literature from the 3 years since the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health's (ICF's) endorsement, focusing on those articles that discuss (a) what the ICF means and how it can be used; (b) the general utility of the ICF for specific fields, such as nursing, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, and audiology; (c) examples of applications for classification in particular disorders, such as chronic health conditions, neuromusculoskeletal conditions, cognitive disorders, mental disorders, sensory disorders, and primary and secondary conditions in children; (d) uses of the ICF to recode prior work across multiple surveys and across country coding schemes on disability-related national survey items; and (e) governmental uses of the ICF in the United States and selected countries abroad. Future directions needed to effectively implement the ICF across rehabilitation policy, research, and practice are discussed.

Our review suggests that the actual application of the ICF is as yet somewhat limited because the World Health Organization (WHO) endorsement is so recent; the earliest references using the ICF correspond with the WHO's 2001 endorsement. Standardized application of the ICF in North America has yet to be realized in anticipation of the release of the clinical implementation manual (see Reed et al., 2005); thus, it is not surprising to find limited research on clinical implementation of the ICF. From our review of the literature and of unpublished reports, it seems clear that the ICF is being used in a preliminary fashion to inform conceptual frameworks in research and for recoding data from other health classifications. Recently completed and ongoing research has undoubtedly not yet been published.

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