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Teaching Note

According to the World Health Organisation, disability is characterized as a disadvantage that afflicts an individual and which emanates from bodily, mental or functional dysfunction.

This disadvantage may limit or even prevent the individual from fulfilling a physiologic role with regard to age, sex, or the social and cultural elements (DePauw and Gavron, 1995).

The disabilities are divided into three main categories (Bleck and Nagel, 1982), namely bodily disabilities, intellectual disabilities and those that affect the senses.

Disabilities as a result of dysfunction, injury or damage to the central or peripheral nervous system, disabilities as a result of orthopaedic problems, and finally disabilities brought about as a result of amputations, and disproportion in growth belong to the first category.

Down syndrome and cognitive difficulties such as autism, split attention, and hyperactive syndrome belong to the second category (Stergioulas, 2005).

Disturbances of hearing, deafness or impaired hearing, and blindness and seriously impaired sight belong to the third and final category (Salter, 1984; Dunn and Fait, 1989).

Cerebral palsy, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease and multiple sclerosis are disabilities which are caused by damage to the CNS/peripheral NS and the skeleton (Salter, 1984).

Disabilities that are brought about by damage of peripheral NS and skeleton include injuries in the spinal cord, meningocele and myelomeningocele (Pariorek and Jones, 1995).

Certain orthopaedics problems that limit the ability to walk such as dislocation of the hip, osteomyelitis, poliomyelitis, epiphysiolysis, juvenile arthritis, osteochondritis and amputation of the lower limbs also exist (Dunn and Fait, 1989).

Recognition of People with Disabilities

Historically, the rights of people who face disability have always been a subject of discussion and this section of society has always had to face a certain kind of discrimination. The recognition of the rights of people in this group developed after changes that were observed in the social attitudes and behaviours. Over time, people suffering from some kind of disability were killed, tortured, ignored, exiled, exploited, categorized, or conversely were the recipients of care and attention, education and often considered as having a divine origin; they inspired superstition, awe and fear but were also considered as people who had little or nothing to offer.

The first acceptance of people with disabilities began during the 18th century, when the necessity of a departure from the feeling of fear, superstition and animosity was realised to one of pity and a decision to offer education and training to those sadly afflicted. The period was one of rationalism and enlightenment where the tendency for the acceptance of people with disabilities was greatly enhanced by the contribution of teachers and philosophers.

The 19th century then saw the beginning of an educational system designed to help people with disabilities and other social reforms to establish an institution of a special class or order.

The world wars had positive effect in the confrontation of people with disabilities. Veterans injured in the wars were readily accepted in their communities, and continued to enjoy this acceptance, despite their bodily disability.

The increased knowledge of the bodily disabilities succumbed to by war veterans and their acceptance by society as a whole was extended as a natural consequence to children suffering from disability.

The Recognition of People with Disabilities in Greece

The recognition of this section of society did not take place as early as in other advanced countries as during those critical years Greece was still under Turkish occupation.

The first efforts for the recognition of people with disabilities began after 1900 and were supported mainly by private individuals who at their own expenses founded the first institutions. These first steps offered help and assistance in the form of education to those people who suffered from visual disability.

Special schools for children with intellectual disabilities were founded in 1972 and 1973, while the first drawing up of an analytic program for these schools was established in 1974. The rights of education for the disability were guaranteed in 1975, and the first law on special education was the 1566/1985 amendment according to which people suffering from disabilities were referred to as persons with special needs or handicapped individuals.

This law changed in 2001 after the revision of the Constitution (No 21, paragraph 6), according to which the persons with special needs or individuals or handicapped individuals were termed as individuals with disabilities.

The Classification of People with Disabilities

Classification is the process of the body control of the specific disability that allows for the classification according to category/degree. The objective of classification is legitimate competition – a «field of activity of equal occasions». The classification is applied to almost all sports and focuses on one or more of the following variables: (a) The nature of disability of the athlete (medical disability), (b) the functional capacity of the athlete to execute the dexterities that are connected with the sport in which he or she participate (functional classification) and (c) the records of athlete in previous competitions (Pariorek & Jones, 1994).

The athletes who participate in the Para Olympic Games are classified in six different teams of disabilities: 1) athletes with amputations, 2) athletes with cerebral palsy, 3) athletes with visual impairments, 4) athletes with spinal cord injuries, 5) athletes with cognitive disabilities and 6) athletes including all those who do not belong to the above mentioned teams (Les Autres).

The Historical Development of Sports for People with Disabilities, The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and The Paralympic Games (PG)

Organised sports for people with disabilities began in 1946 when a team of invalid war veterans using wheel chairs for mobility took part in a basket ball match. The athletic centre of Stoke Mandeville in Ashbury (England) founded by the neurologist Sir Ludwig Guttman was the venue for this first international match between players confined to wheel chairs.

In 1982, the International Coordinative Organisation Committee of Sports for the disabled was founded, and on September 22, 1989, in Düsseldorf, (Germany), the IPC was founded as an international non-profit organisation. The IPC is the world organisation for the governing of sports for athletes with disabilities, and acts as an international federation for most Olympic sports. It oversees and coordinates the summer and winter PG that are carried out every four years after the end of the Olympic Games, and also for world championship meetings. The IPC also supports the recruitment and development of athletes at a local, national and international level in all levels of competency.

All members including the International Athletic Federation and Organisations for athletes with disabilities, National Paralympic Committees, and local athletic organisations participate in the General Assembly of the IPC. The Federation has a democratic constitution with elected representatives from all the organisations concerned.

Historical Development of Sports for the Disabled in Greece, The Greek Paralympic Committee (GPC) and The National Athletic Federation for the Disabled

In 1988, the Greek federation of sports for individuals with deaf disabilities was founded, and in the same year basketball championships took place between teams in wheel chairs from two different associations. On July 2, 1994, the Greek Wheelchair Basketball Federation was founded, and in 1998 the Greek federation became a member of the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF), which is a member of FIBA.

The GPC was founded in 2002 and is the responsible institution for the growth and organisation of the Paralympic movement in Greece, and is also responsible for the selection of members of Greek teams which participate in the PG.

The National Athletic Federation of people with disabilities was founded in the same year, 2002, and represents all the categories of these athletes with responsibility for not only the summer and winter Paralympic sports, but for other sports that are not included in the Paralympic events.

The Federation is a member of all the International Athletic Federations of people with disabilities (IBSA, CP-ISRA, ISMWSF, ISOD, and INAS - FID) and officially represents Greece in all the sports.

Greek Athletes who Participated in PG since 1976

The first medals won by Greek athletes were in the PG in Seoul, 1988, 1 silver and 3 bronze. In the PG in Barcelona, 1992, 2 silver and 1 bronze, while in the Games of Atlanta in 1996, athletes won 1 gold, 1 silver and 3 bronze. In 2000, in the PG in Sydney, Greek athletes won 11 medals (4 gold, 4 silver, 3 bronze), whereas in the PG in Athens, Greece won a total of 20 medals (3 gold, 13 silver, 4 bronze).

The first participation of Greek athletes in Winter PG was in 2002, in the Salt Lake City. The PG, in Turin, 2006 were the second winter PG where Greek athletes took part.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the recognition of people with disabilities in Greece in all walks of life may lag some way behind that of their contemporaries in other developed countries, a lot has been done in the field of sports to support and encourage participation. With the foundation of the GPC and the National Athletic Federation, the management of sport for people with disabilities has improved considerably.

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