Summary of Key findings

National guidance for measuring home furniture and fittings to enable user self-assessment and successful fit of minor assistive devices

Key findings

- The scoping review identified inconsistencies across studies in relation to measuring height of home furniture.
- From the 325 responses received at the on-line survey, only 64 therapists reported using guidance. From the 15 guidance leaflets that were received, only 8 were found to meet Level 3 Adult Literacy Standards. Differences in how to take measurements were identified with no guidance reported for baths.
- The nominal groups revealed that therapists utilized different measurement processes to those used in research.
- The focus groups revealed that a simple guidance focusing on “how” to measure is needed.
- Intra-rater reliability for the guidance developed was statistically supported for most of the items (apart from 3) when the guidance was used by therapists. With respect to the service users, intra-rater reliability was not supported for half of the measurements. However, the descriptive analysis revealed that the guidance improved accuracy and consistency in measuring.
- The majority of the respondents (over 82.5%) found the guidance easy to use, clearly presented and helpful in taking measurements. Some suggestions for further improvement were provided.

Project aims

- To collate existing guidance that occupational therapists currently use themselves or issue to service users in order to measure home furniture for provision of minor assistive devices used in bath, toilet, bed, chair and stair transfers (stage 1).
- To gather qualitative information on the quality of such guidance (stage 1).
- To develop guidance based on the information gathered and test its content validity (stage 2).
- To establish whether the guidance is comprehensible and usable for service users and therapists (stage 3).
- To establish the intra-rater reliability and the accuracy of the guidance (stage 4).
- To evaluate the developed guidance using the wider audience (stage 5).

Background

Despite the reported benefits of using assistive devices, there are barriers to ensuring that they are successfully adopted and used. Equipment abandonment is associated with a number of factors including lack of involvement of the service user in the process of selecting it and lack of fit of the devices between users and their environment.

At the moment, there is no standardised guidance on how one should measure and there are also questions about how occupational therapists advise users or carers to do so themselves. It appears that practice can vary in different services.

Enabling people to accurately measure the home environment and the person in order to ensure successful fit of minor assistive devices, is the focus of this study. More specifically, the focus is on measurements of baths, toilets, beds, chairs, and stairs for provision of minor assistive devices that facilitate transfers.
Methodology

The study consisted of 5 stages using mixed methods. Experts in provision of assistive devices, occupational therapists and service users, were involved throughout the study:

A scoping review was conducted to summarise existing research on how to measure beds, chairs, toilets, baths and stairs and identify any published guidance. An on-line survey with occupational therapists working in NHS and social care settings in England established any guidance being used at these settings (stage 1). Nominal groups with expert occupational therapists and service users determined core set of domains for measuring furniture and obtained consensus regarding the content of the developed guidance (stage 2). Focus groups with service users and health professionals ascertained whether the developed guidance would be usable in terms of readability, comprehensibility and communicative effectiveness, and refined it further (stage 3). A within-group design was used to test the intra-rater reliability of the guidance by correlating measurements taken with the use of guidance at two different points in time. Increase of accuracy of measurements was also tested by identifying the discrepancy of measurements among each participant and a criterion set (stage 4). The guidance was made available to the wider audience through the Disabled Living Foundation and Shaw Trust website (http://asksara.dlf.org.uk/brunel) so that feedback on its easiness and usefulness could be obtained (stage 5).

Recommendations

- The guidance can be used:
  - by health professionals to direct them on how to measure and on the environmental factors that need to be considered during the assessment process. This can promote a more timely, safe, consistent and transparent way of assessment and fitting of assistive devices
  - within the training of trusted assessors as outlined in the competency framework to facilitate this process and in the education of occupational therapy students.
- Service users with less complex needs or their carers may use the guidance to measure their home environment and self. These measurements could then be communicated to the specialists so that a joint decision is made about the most appropriate type of equipment.
- Enabling service users and their carers to measure themselves will allow them greater control over service provision and could positively impact on equipment abandonment. This may also reduce unnecessary home visits and allow therapists to spend their time more efficiently.
- Occupational therapists are not always aware of how quality guidance should be devised, which supports a better education campaign about the importance of using standardised guidance.
- Future research needs to look at further assistive devices that could be added in the existing guidance.
- Future research needs to establish the margin of error in taken measurements that would be considered as clinically acceptable and that would not affect a person’s function or cause health and safety issues.
- Future research should identify the outcomes of the personalisation agenda in relation to equipment provision. The current study identified a debate among health professionals and service users as to the benefits and the threats of self-assessment with potential political implications.

Publications
