**Communicating the Human Right to Science to Stakeholders**

**Introduction**

The human right to science may be a game changer to people with disabilities. Complex rehabilitation technologies are often difficult to access due to expense, commercial unavailability, and lack of awareness of how to access the technologies. This concern is particularly true for people with severe injuries for whom science and technology can radically improve their lives, such as individuals who have sustained a spinal cord injury. The human right to science may facilitate access to resources that are critical to participation in society. Can the human right to science be used to overcome barriers people with disabilities experience?

People with spinal cord injury must work in partnership with stakeholders to facilitate their rehabilitation and community reintegration. Support persons, health care professionals, scientists, and others are key to assuring that a person with a spinal cord injury can exercise her human right to science when it comes to rehabilitation and reintegration. Crucial to this reliance is raising awareness of the human right to science among these stakeholders and persons with SCI. Increasing awareness of the human right to science among these stakeholders can inspire creative and effective policies to improve access to science and technology in general and in particular for people with disabilities.

**Barriers to Community Reintegration**

We must keep in mind the heterogeneity of disability, which manifests in a wide gradient of needs and desires for science and technology. One reason this comment concentrates on the condition of spinal cord injury (SCI) is because it is an injury that often results in catastrophic functional challenges that can be mitigated by technology and specialized services. Barriers to accessing technology are commonly experienced by people living with SCI, challenging their abilities to participate meaningfully in society. The human right to science may be a useful framework for understanding how support persons, scientists, health professionals and others may facilitate provision of life enhancing interventions and technology for people with SCI. Increasing human rights literacy among these stakeholders can inspire creative and effective policies to improve access to science and technology.

**Awareness of the Human Right to Science**

More often than not, health professionals and people with disabilities are unaware of the human right to science, necessitating education to address the long-term social needs of people with disabilities. Encouraging health professionals to adopt a human rights perspective of disability challenges dominant medical model perspectives and practices. A potentially successful approach toward implementing a human rights model of disability involves engagement of health professionals and people with disabilities as partners. A key step toward increasing human rights discourse involves education of both parties about human rights doctrine and its potential value in advancing the rights of people with disabilities to benefit from life enhancing technology. The same is true of other stakeholders, including the support person of the individual with SCI.

**Promoting Awareness of the Human Right to Science**

Promoting the human right to science and its value and meaning to people with disabilities can be accomplished through a number of different methods. Educational information can be disseminated to people with disabilities and support persons via various consumer groups and organizations. Human rights ombudspersons can hold seminars and forums with stakeholders, including government, non-profit, and for-profit organizations. Information can be disseminated to professional societies across the health professions. Educational opportunities can be developed through certification and licensure renewal activities required of health professionals, as well as through annual ethics training programs that many health care institutions mandate. Information to developers of technology can be provided through engineering and related professional organizations.