

Debate:

Should we be sending Equipment Overseas?

Summary of Pro v Cons Debate and a statement from members

The issue of sending rehabilitation equipment overseas is a constant source of debate as ADAPT members and their associates are faced with the pros and cons of being involved in sourcing, sending, using, adapting and maintaining physiotherapy equipment in the international setting. It is important to consider a number of points to ensure the health and safety of the recipients and to take account of the ethical, social and economic implications of donating equipment.

This paper aims to bring together differing views as an objective set of comments based on practical experiences that will continue to be faced and provide points to consider in deciding what to do based on the context and the reality of the situation they are faced with.

ADAPT Scenarios of the Provision of Equipment Overseas

There are many examples of good and bad practice that physiotherapists have experiences in all context which guide the debate towards taking each situation on a case by case basis. The examples below address some of the issues that ADAPT members face and possible solutions to suggest ways forward in the debate.

CBR Setting

An organisation had been working with the Ministry of Health to develop community rehabilitation services for children with differing disabilities in the town and surrounding villages, mainly with mobility and communication difficulties. National rehabilitation services had been institutionalised in 2-3 special centres where children with disability and caregivers attended an intensive set of physiotherapy sessions focusing on passive exercises, wax and electrotherapy. The children returned home to continue some basic exercises without any mobility aids to develop their balance, standing or walking skills.

With the donation of models of corner chairs, wedges, K walkers, Pedro boots, leg splints etc., the local staff were trained to assess and measure a child for the use of the equipment and then use local materials to make basic equipment to support the children's development. Then the parents were encouraged to also copy the relevant equipment to use in the home setting.

Emergency Setting

After an earthquake, 5 containers of adult one size wheelchairs of arrived in the affected area sent from abroad as a donation to support the injured and disabled to a small community NGO. The donation was very welcome as people were in desperate need. The distribution of wheelchairs was a challenging activity as none of the staff were trained to assess, measure or know how to use them. So wheelchairs were given out as soon as they identified people with mobility needs. Clearly many of the wheelchairs chairs were not well suited for the individual, being too wide or long and high for the person to be able to use it as a mobility aid. None of the wheelchairs were suitable for children or for people with complex injuries, such as SCI, TBI, persons with double amputee and these people remained isolated in their tents and shelters. The local organisation linked up with a team of therapists when the next container arrived.

How do these 2 Scenarios help the debate? Possibly to reinforce each situation needs to be looked at on a case by case basis.

However ADAPT members and associates held a lively debate in the ADAPT November 2014 Study Day; the 2 charts below summarise some key points that show the diversity of views.

Pros				
If one piece of useful equipment is provided, it can be copied locally and reproduced using local materials	Clinically for local staff it opens up and/or strengthens a greater number of treatment options	Provides concrete training opportunities to strengthen rehabilitation services and outcomes for the patient	In LMICS, equipment providers caregivers/ families with a tool to improve the quality of their child or adults mobility and independence	Can bridge the gap where areas with limited resources are developing the technology and know how to make the equipment locally

Cons				
Equipment has the potential to do more harm than good if people are not clear how to fit and use it	Not a sustainable process as donations tend to be random and not based on demand from the LMIC	Often delivery and distribution of equipment is not coordinated by a non technical person	Better to support the local economy and resources in LMICs	Many children and adults need continued provision of specialised equipment so providing on a one off basis is not a useful solution

Points to consider

ADAPT proposes that the debate around 'Should we send equipment abroad?' is not a straight forward issue and the answer to the question is probably - it depends on the context.

The type of international activities that attract donations - not only equipment - is complex and links with voluntary and non-voluntary actors, including humanitarian and private sector, with varying commitments and time lines, which need to be reflected on in this debate.

From ADAPT's perspective:

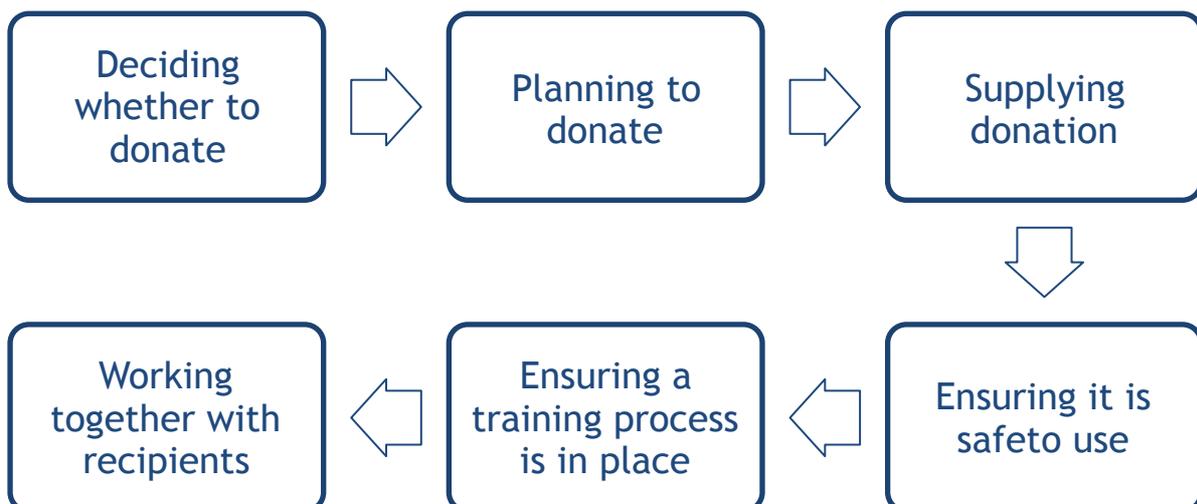
What are some key points for a potential donor to consider?

- Do you know if the equipment is needed?
- Is there a mechanism for maintaining the equipment sent at the local level?
- Can this equipment be useful in another setting?
- Could this item be sourced more easily and sustainably from another location?

What are some of the key points for people working with recipient organisations to consider?

- Do you have members to support the delivery of donations to the recipients?
- Do you have a store with security?
- Do you need training to know more about using the donation?
- Do you have the means to adapt, maintain the donation?
- Do you want a donation of this item or are there other items more useful?

The pathway of donation shown below may be a way for ADAPT members and associates to frame their debate to move ahead with highlighting that rehabilitation equipment donation all depends on the where, when, how and why.



Possibly SMART goals are a useful framework to be able to keep the complexity of donating in perspective to assist in the direction of what to do when faced with the dilemma of donation.