

Functional Classification in Paralympic Sports

Prof Dr Shamsul Azhar Shah

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Medical Centre, Kuala Lumpur

A major component of Paralympic Sports is classification. Classification provides a structure for competition which allows athletes to compete against others with similar disabilities or similar levels of physical function. Since it was founded by Dr Ludwig Guttmann it has undergone tremendous change. It started back then with dividing the spinal cord lesions athletes to higher and lower categories which was impairment-based classification system. Following that the classification moved towards medical diagnosis but it created too many classes and subsequently too many events. Functional based classification system was used after that which allows combination of several medical diagnosis to compete in the same event. Since the widespread adoption of functional systems of classification, Paralympic Sports has continued to mature rapidly. An athlete's classification had a significant impact on the degree of success they are likely to achieve, and the concept of functional classification, based on performance, was questioned. Since 2007 the Paralympic Movement is committed to the development of evidence based classification systems which is also sports specific. This new concept has encouraged medical classifiers, sports technicians and sports scientists to embark on researches which look into aspects such as impairment testing, novel activities (sports specific activities) and biomechanics studies related to their sports. With these efforts it is hope that the Paralympic Sports classification system will be more valid and reliable in the future. In this presentation we will discuss the previous and current classification system by showing a few examples and also what are the challenges ahead.