Globally connected for successful rehabilitation

International platforms promote exchange of vocational rehabilitation

Inclusion and participation are human rights. Not just in Germany, but worldwide. Therefore, the exchange of experiences at an international level in a global world is becoming increasingly important. The principle “learn from the best” is one of the most generally valid concepts for success. This also applies to services on offer within vocational rehabilitation. Experts around the world connect to form a cross-border dialogue using international platforms. REHAVISION gives an overview of global networks, country-specific rehab approaches and effects within the international arena. Page 3

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Dear reader,

Globalization and digitalization are bringing the world ever closer together. International exchange and mutual understanding are becoming more and more important. We are in demand to take a look beyond our own horizons. But this not only helps to develop new perspectives and solutions, it also helps to sharpen the perception of the strengths and weaknesses of one’s own system.

In the first issue of REHAvision 2019, we would like to take a look outside the proverbial “box”. We took the 10th anniversary of the ratification of the UN Disability Rights Convention, the 15th Congress of the European Forum for Research in Rehabilitation in April 2019, and the General Assembly of Rehabilitation International in November 2018 in Berlin as an opportunity to learn more about international networking in rehabilitation and approaches from different countries. I would like to take this opportunity in particular to thank Professor Dr Joachim Breuer and Dr Friedrich Mehrhoff from the German Social Accident Insurance, who have made a major contribution to this issue with their knowledge and experience from international work.

Although international exchange is not the focus of our association’s work, we have nevertheless noticed that there is increasing international interest in vocational rehabilitation and the work of the Berufsförderungswerke (Vocational Rehabilitation Centres). Here, for example, we recently participated in the programme of the General Assembly of Rehabilitation International welcomed and informed delegations from Poland, Russia and Brazil about the system of vocational rehabilitation in Germany. We would like to continue this exchange in the future and we would be pleased if the dialogue and in some time perhaps also mutual projects contribute to further improving the participation of people with disabilities also internationally.

Your

Dr Susanne Gebauer

Chairman of the Board of the Federal Association of Vocational Rehabilitation Centres, Germany

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Globally connected for successful rehabilitation
International platforms promote exchange of vocational rehabilitation

“The more people act globally on planet earth, the more worthwhile is the exchange of experiences about national solutions, in the context of rehabilitation too” says Dr Friedrich Mehrhoff from German Statutory Accident Insurance Company (DGUV) and head of the expert committee “Work and Employment” at the international association Rehabilitation International. In REHAVISION, he gives us an overview of the impact and exchange within rehabilitation in the international arena.

Worldwide, people suffering from chronic illnesses or disabilities, including those caused by accidents, don’t just want to receive good medical care, they also want to take part in life in society once more, and be part of the workforce as independently as possible. But the opportunities differ widely. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), more than a billion people worldwide live with a disability. Half of them cannot afford any health care. If you have a disability, you’re more likely to become unemployed and slip into poverty, according to the WHO report. So, participation and inclusion are key aspects of a self-determined life. Even if the status quo of developments in the individual countries is quite different, the interest in an exchange of ideas is equally high everywhere. For everyone can benefit from mutual exchange and combining tried and tested processes and expert knowledge with national knowledge and experiences.

‘If you’re only ever out in your own area of work, you pass up the opportunity for stimulation from external sources.’
Dr Rolf Buschmann-Steinhage, head of the area Rehab Sciences at the German Pension Insurance Association

“Not only in Germany is there great medical and vocational rehabilitation”, says Dr Rolf Buschmann-Steinhage, head of the area Rehab Sciences at the German Pension Insurance Association. “Rehabilitation also takes place in other countries, often in a different way to here. We can learn from this – mutually, in fact.” In practical terms, this happens via international contacts, which often arise via corresponding networks.

Rehabilitation regarded as a German export hit

Many countries have already benefitted from the German system of rehabilitation. Rehabilitation can be regarded as a German export hit, covering all institutions involved in participation, particularly for medical rehabilitation with the world’s only inpatient facilities for medical-vocational participation for complex cases. But the vocational support agencies, where people with disabilities receive practical vocational qualifications also support ability to work in the initial labour employment market. And this is all based on one of the most advanced rehab legislation systems in the world, the Federal Participation Act (BTHG), with an individual-oriented, preventative, cooperative approach.

One of the most innovative methods from Germany is participation management as support for complex cases. Here, the European Union, with participation from the German Statutory Accident Insurance Company as a junior partner, funds a training program at four universities in Poland. Another example is the training to become Disability Managers, which has already been carried out in Germany successfully for several years now. Belgium has also been training Disability Managers for a while now, whose job it is to preserve the ability to work of workers with health issues.
Learning from the neighbours

But the benefits of international collaboration are also clear for Germany. For Germany is also learning from other countries. This is how the idea for a personal budget arose in Holland. Vocational health professionals in Finlannd don’t just work in a preventative manner, they are also able to work in a rehabilitative way. The good points don’t have to be transferred in exactly the same way. Approaches with an innovative character for development of services in Germany are enough. This concept of international collaboration is also enshrined in Article 32 of the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Based on the National Action Plan (NAP), the Federal Government commissioned a study with the DGUV, to find good examples of accessibility in private employers worldwide. This will be completed at the end of October 2019 and is already showing some interesting approaches from Holland, where companies receive systematic advice on how to re-design work areas so that people with disabilities can have a job. In the USA, companies are given incentives via a reward system if, for example, they consider aspects of accessibility.

Growing value of international exchange of ideas

The international comparison of rehab systems is becoming more important as prevention and rehabilitation grow in importance for the competitiveness of companies in the global economy. Quite simply, the preservation and restoration of the ability to work is a guarantee for the success of the national economy. This is particularly clear in countries such as the EU member states or China, where companies have to react to an ageing society and workforce. In short: The growing importance of global influences is reflected in the growing value of an international exchange. This reciprocal effect has played a role in vocational safety for a long time now, for example in the textile industry in Bangladesh.

Prevention as a part of social security

Increasingly, Return to Work is part of prevention as a part of social security – and Return to Work requires rehabilitation. Here, the international comparison of social services such as vocational participation really does play even more of a role. This applies particularly to companies in the EU because of the freedom of movement of the workforce. A deeper comparison with Finnland is useful, because it has one of the most modern rehab systems, or France, because it is an important neighbour of Germany. In general, there is a need for an exchange of studies on the efficiency of rehab services in the sense of “Return on Investment” within Europe and worldwide. This subject is of major importance, both for the development of rehabilitation, such as in Asia currently, as well as the maintenance of rehabilitation, as in Europe.

The value of rehabilitation in Germany is then reinforced once more by the international exchange and networking. It makes sense here for the bodies involved in rehabilitation to set themselves up internationally and devote themselves to cooperations. It is often not enough when international divisions in organisations cover the subject of rehabilitation, in order to keep foreign delegations informed. What is required for the rehabilitation area is much more a stand-alone, international perspective. This involves strengthening
its importance, not reducing it. The German Pension Insurance Association has been following this path since 2018.

An ongoing exchange between experts in rehabilitation on one side and experts in international collaboration on the other is extremely important here, in order to facilitate transfer of successful examples from other countries to Germany. This kind of reciprocal effect between specialist departments would also be of benefit, for example in the Federal Ministry for Work and Social Affairs, and also in the collaboration between the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). For an increasing number of partner countries are interested in an economic collaboration in the context of preserving and restoring ability to work with rehabilitation tools, and also with regard to the implementation of Article 26/27 of the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

**Germany needs platforms**

How can international rehabilitation and its reciprocal effects be drawn more sharply into focus? Individual operative measures already taken can make an important contribution. For example, rehabilitation organisations can expand their online presence to include an English language version of their range of services. In addition, Germany needs platforms showing which organisations are operating internationally, where and how. This would allow German bodies to network more efficiently in an international context. In any case, it does not cost much to set up an electronic platform, where German organisations involved in rehab can give each other information about international meetings and specialist conventions.

EU rehabilitation projects can also create greater international anchoring. Last but not least, national conferences can be reinforced with international guests and subjects, as in the 28th Rehabilitation Sciences Colloquium this year. It is taking place along with the 15th Congress of the European Forum for Research in Rehabilitation (EFRR). Under the umbrella theme “Rehabilitation – shaping healthcare for the future”, the academic program of the two events addresses the subject of the central role of rehabilitation as a global health strategy for the future. Only one year later in 2020, the next world congress of Rehabilitation International will take place in the Danish city of Arhus. “Coming together is always of benefit” – those involved in international rehab activity are absolutely certain.

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**3 BRUSSELS | BELGIUM**
- European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP) representing the social insurance providers in Europe
- European Forum for Research in Rehabilitation (EFRR) forms a platform for academics from a range of disciplines in the area of rehabilitation
- European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR), an association of rehab service providers, including BFW Bad Wildbad, Hamm (Josefsgesellschaft) and Cologne
- European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)

**4 GENEVA | SWITZERLAND**
- Global Rehabilitation Alliance founded in 2018 to strengthen rehabilitation within health services at an international level.
- International Social Security Association (ISSA). This represents service providers worldwide.

**5 ROTTERDAM | THE NETHERLANDS**
- European Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (ESPRM)

**6 MILAN | ITALY**
- International Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (ESPRM)
“Making the world more inclusive”
Interview with Jan Monsbakken, former President of Rehabilitation International

Worldwide, there is only one network in which people with disabilities, government organizations, rehabilitation agencies, service providers and scientists work together to improve the participation of people with disabilities: the World Association for Rehabilitation International (RI), founded in 1922. REHAVISIOIN talked with RI board member and former president Jan Monsbakken from Norway about international impulses and challenges.

REHAVISIOIN: How important is the international exchange for development of rehabilitation?

Jan Monsbakken: First of all I think that in general national and international work goes hand in hand in all aspects of developments. This is also the case when it comes to rehabilitation. Rehabilitation in Germany gets impulses from the international society and the international society gets impulses from Germany. There are many International instruments and entities that influence national rehabilitation systems and services. I can mention one example from my organization Rehabilitation International which illustrates this. In 1969 RI invented the concept Community Based Rehabilitation. This was later taken forward and implemented by the WHO following the Declaration of Alma Ata in 1978. This concept is implemented in many countries around the world.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has one specific article on Habilitation and Rehabilitation (art 26) and one article on work and employment (art 27). These articles give strong obligations to all countries that have ratified the Convention to ensure good rehabilitation services to all. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also states that rehabilitation is a human right and that all countries are obliged to ensure good rehabilitation services to all. This is a strong obligation to all countries that have ratified the Convention.

I will also mention the important work from the WHO related to rehabilitation mentioned in the WHO global disability action plan 2014-2021 and Rehabilitation 2030 – a call for action which was initiated by the WHO in 2017. This has also lead to the establishment of the Global Rehabilitation Alliance. This new Civil society organization was established to ensure a stronger focus on rehabilitation world wide. Rehabilitation experts from Germany have been very instrumental in the establishment of this Alliance.

Which are the greatest international challenges?

Jan Monsbakken: In order to secure good rehabilitation services for all there is a strong need making the world more inclusive. I think that it’s a fact that those countries that are most inclusive also are the countries with the best developed rehabilitation services for the population. To achieve this all Nations most work hard to ensure that we meet UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) by 2030, developing Universal Health Coverage and have a stronger political focus on rehabilitation globally. There is a strong need to make politicians understand on national, regional and global level that rehabilitation is not a cost for the society, but an investment in the population. Rehabilitation is not only good for the person it’s also good for the society. It’s a win-win situation.

What distinguishes the system of rehabilitation in Germany?

Jan Monsbakken: Coming from Norway I have to admit that I am not an expert on the German system, but through my work in Rehabilitation International I have learned to know a bit about the German rehabilitation system. The German system of rehabilitation differs from other countries by the fact that there are several different payers since different insurances are responsible for different groups. I visited some DGUV clinics. DGUV is responsible for the rehabilitation of all persons who have an accident at work. They are also service providers in rehabilitation. Based on this experience I have the impression that the rehabilitation services in Germany carried out with a strong focus on the individual, early intervention, close follow up with a very strong focus on systematic return to work guidelines. I think many countries have much to learn from Germany when it comes to the system approach, the person centred approach, the systematic professional work and the political recognition of rehabilitation.
Rehabilitation is worth it
ISSA study proves economic benefits of vocational reintegration

Rehab not pension, that’s the principle in the German healthcare system and social service legislation. But what does the macro-economic balance sheet for services in vocational participation look like? This is the subject of a study by the International Social Security Association (ISSA). Professor Dr Joachim Breuer, President of the ISSA and Managing Director of the DGUV, presents the results.

On one side, rehabilitation helps the employee to remain independent and employed after an accident or an illness. On the other, it helps the employer to keep specialist staff and maintain economic productivity. Successful reintegration is also of relevance for social insurance systems, as social security contributions are rising, and pension or health cover payments can be avoided.

“Frequently, only the costs of rehabilitation are seen, and not the medium to long-term profitability.”

Professor Dr Joachim Breuer, President of the ISSA and Managing Director of the German Statutory Accident Insurance Company DGUV

This benefit of investment in good quality rehabilitation and reintegration is not well known enough at the international level. Frequently, only the costs of rehabilitation are seen, and not the medium to long-term profitability. This was one reason why the specialist committee at the International Social Security Association commissioned an academic study on “Return to Work Integration”. The study was led by the German Statutory Accident Insurance Company (DGUV) and the Canadian “National Institute of Disability Management and Research” (NIDMAR) plus “Rehabilitation International” (RI) and “IBM Curam” took part as project partners.

Cost benefit analysis

The aim of the project was to record the context of rehabilitation in various countries and to carry out a cost benefit analysis. To do this, DGUV developed a questionnaire and distributed it to international partners. In the first step, primary data was gathered from insurance companies. The focus was on level of claim, success and costs of services delivered. The relationship between services and expenditure was established using statistical methods. In total, data from 19 social security companies from 12 countries was captured, representing hundreds of companies from Europe, North and South America, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. However, describing the success of reintegration activities academically cannot merely be based on the recorded economic statistics at the end of the medical and vocational rehabilitation process. It is also worth evaluating the extent to which the success is actually related to the services delivered. To do this, an in-house rehab benefit model was developed, which helped assess the potential success of the rehab. The years of occupation gained and the days of inability to work saved acted as fundamental indicators for the model calculation. Then the years of occupation or the days of inability to work saved by reintegration were converted into a financial value, and contrasted with the investment costs. Country-specific context factors were also included here.

Results prove economic potential

On average, the evaluation of all the parameters resulted in a cost/benefit factor that speaks for itself: The return on investment for employers amounted to a factor of 3.7. For social security systems the additional income and pension payments avoided exceeded the costs by an average cost/benefit factor of 2.9. The total society benefit amounted to a factor of 2.8.

The calculations illustrate the great economic potential of investment in vocational reintegration for all those involved. Activities relating to medical and vocational rehabilitation secure employment are thus a major component of a healthy, functioning national economy. The results show that political decision-makers should support investment in reintegration activities, even in cases where the expected effect of the treatment is minor. On average, even this leads to a positive return on investment for employers and social insurance systems, as well as society as a whole. In short: Rehab pays off.
28 Vocational support organisations
Suppliers of vocational rehabilitation and prevention

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