The use of a wheelchair for stroke patients

Why do I need a wheelchair?
After a stroke you may be given a wheelchair. This will either be for a short time while you are in hospital or may be for a longer period of time to use after you have been discharged.

There are lots of reasons for using a wheelchair and it should not be seen as a backward step, but as a positive part of your rehabilitation.

You may need a wheelchair for sitting out of bed in a good position that encourages your recovery. A wheelchair may allow you to go off the ward and around the hospital with your family and friends. At a later stage in your recovery you may use one when going home for visits.

The occupational therapist and physiotherapist will advise you and your family regarding the safe use of wheelchairs.

Types of wheelchairs
Small wheeled - this type needs someone to push it. It is often used by stroke patients to prevent overuse of the unaffected side caused by pushing themselves.

Large wheeled - this type is rarely used by stroke patients because of the risks of pushing themselves and overusing the unaffected side.

Tilt-in space - this is a large wheelchair that can help maintain your joints in the correct position. It can also recline you so you are less at risk of falling. It tends to be used in the early stages of recovery or with patients who are more unwell and need more support.

Powered - this is battery operated and there are three different types: one for use indoors, one for outdoors and one for combined indoor and outdoor use. They may not always be a suitable option and need specific assessment from a wheelchair service.

Your needs will be assessed and carefully monitored to provide a chair most suitable for you. You may be issued with several different chairs during your hospital stay.

If necessary, you will be loaned an appropriate chair when you go home. This is provided by the local NHS wheelchair service, which runs a free long-term loan service.

You can also buy a wheelchair privately under the government voucher scheme. A voucher is issued for an amount (dependent on your needs) which you then top up with private funds. More information is available from your therapists or the local wheelchair service.
Wheelchair cushions
You will be provided with a pressure-relieving cushion to use with your wheelchair. You will be assessed in order to provide the right type and amount of support.

It is important that you use the cushion that you have been assessed for. This will hopefully prevent future problems with joint/muscle pain and/or pressure ulcers.

Wheelchair safety techniques

1. HOW TO FOLD A WHEELCHAIR AND PLACE IT INTO THE CAR BOOT
   - Remove footrest by unclipping hinge, swing back footplates, then lift each one off.
   - Lift seat canvas to collapse chair.
   - Fold down backrest. Prepare to lift.
   - Keep back straight, bend knees and lift. You may not be able to do this. So ask for help if needed.

2. METHOD FOR GOING UP A KERB
   - Approach the kerb forwards, allow space for their feet.
   - Warn occupant they will be tipped back. Use tipper bar to assist tilting the chair.
   - Lower front wheels gently onto the top of the kerb.
   - Push and lift back wheels onto the top of the kerb.

3. METHOD FOR GOING DOWN A KERB
   - Approach the kerb backwards.
   - Warn occupant you will be tipping them backwards.
   - Roll the back wheels down the kerb gently to the ground.
   - Raise front wheels using tipper bar then move back and gently lower chair down.
Further information

Disabled Living Foundation
380-384 Harrow Road
London
W9N 2HU

Telephone: 0207 289 6111
Helpline: 0845 130 9177
Website: www.dlf.org.uk

British Healthcare Trades Association
1 Webbs Court
Buckhurst Avenue
Sevenoaks
Kent
TN13 1LZ

Telephone: 0173 245 8868
Website: www.bhta.com

The Stroke Association
Whitecross Street
London
EC1Y 8JJ

Website: www.stroke.org.uk

Southern Derbyshire Wheelchair Service
The Manor Store
Manor Park Way
Derby
DE22 3NB

Telephone: 01332 292080
Website: www.southernderbyshire.nhs.uk/homeloans

References
Royal College of Physicians Stroke Guidelines 2006

NHS Direct is a 24 hour nurse led, confidential service providing general health care advice and information.
Telephone 0845 4647 or visit the website at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

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