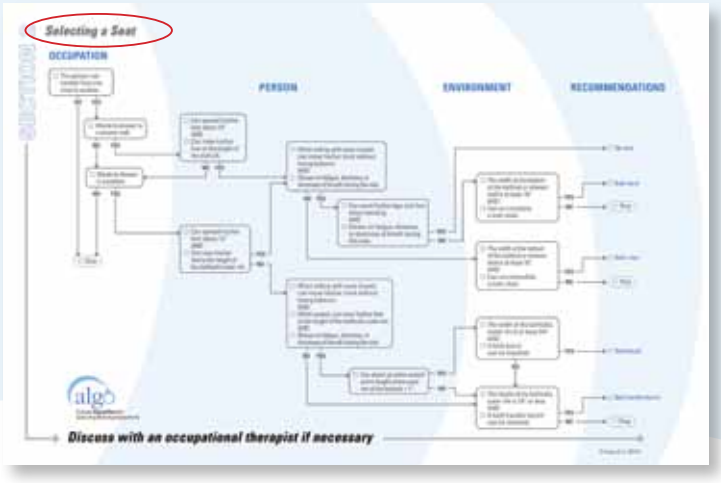
SECTION 2

Selecting a Seat

Section 2 lets non-occupational-therapist personnel determine if the client needs a bath seat and determine which one best suits the client's needs. This section is constructed as a clinical algorithm, specifically, "a set of rules which, if followed, will automatically generate the correct solution" (page 555, Lindsay and Norman, 1977) [15]. Consequently, this section includes a series of items that deal with occupation, person, and environment. Only the elements essential for decision-making in simple cases and for the bath seats currently used with these clients are included.



When solving a problem (in our case, identifying bathing equipment), potential solutions can be based on two types of cognitive tactics: heuristics and algorithms (Lindsay and Norman, 1980). With heuristics, solvers look for analogies between the current problem situation and past situations for which they know the solutions. They then use their skills in recognizing similarities and use strategies to identify solutions that were effective in dealing with past problems. Since heuristics do not guarantee success, the solver can waste time and energy on information that proves to be incidental. In complex clinical situations, occupational therapists have recourse to heuristics in solving the problems encountered.

Hagerton (1996), however, suggested that a health-care professional who encounters a familiar, routine problem solves it through automatic reflexes [16]. In other words, when faced with a "simple case" of a client needing bathing-equipment, occupational therapists use an algorithm tactic to arrive at the right solution. A non-occupational therapist who has a clinical algorithm that reproduces an occupational therapist's reasoning doesn't have to look for indicators or analogies between the current problem and past situations. To illustrate, the "level of initiative," "handedness," and presence of a "pedestal sink" are elements that the occupational therapist can take into consideration before recommending a specific piece of equipment. In an algorithm-based method, this information is unnecessary because it doesn't systematically alter the recommendation. Indeed, whether the client has a little or a lot of initiative, is right-handed or left-handed, or the sink is on a pedestal or in a vanity has no impact on equipment selection. On the other hand, "signs of fatigue" indicate that the client should use a seat with a backrest.

Therefore, the essential elements in selecting a seat, or indicators, as well as the items for measuring them are presented in Table 1. They have been based on a synthesis of information gathered when inventorying Quebec tools and consulting occupational therapists who regularly practise in this field.