# The Social Model of Disability

MEL HARRISON: According to the social model of disability, disability is socially constructed. The social model of disability contrasts with what is called the medical model of disability. According to the medical model of disability, disability is a health condition dealt with by the medical professionals. People with disability are thought to be different to what is normal. Or in other words, thought to be abnormal. Disability is seen to be the problem of the individual and not the problem of society. From the medical model, a person with disability is in need of being fixed or cured. The medical model of disability is all about what a person cannot do and cannot be. From this point of view, disability may be seen as a tragedy and people with disability may be pitied. The social model sees disability is the result of interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. It therefore carries the implication that the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment must change to enable people living with impairments to participate in society or in the community on an equal basis with other people.

A social model perspective does not deny the reality of impairment nor its impact on the actual individual. However, it does challenge the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment to accommodate impairment as an expected incident of human diversity. The social model seeks to change society in order to accommodate people living with impairment. It does not seek to change persons with impairment to accommodate the actual society. It supports the view that people with disability have a right to be fully participating citizens on an equal basis with everyone else. The social model of disability is now internationally recognised way to view and address disability. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, or the UN CRPD, marks the official paradigm shift in attitudes toward people with disability and approaches to disability concerns and issues. People with disability are not objects of charity, medical treatment and social protection but are subjects with rights, capable of claiming those rights, able to make decisions for their own lives based on their free and informed consent and being active members of society. In this context, impairment is a medical condition that leads to disability, while disability is the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and barriers that are in the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment. For example, it's not the inability to walk that keeps a person from being able to enter a building by themselves but the fact that there might be stairs in front of the building that makes the building inaccessible for the wheelchair user to enter the building.