



Benesh Movement Notation for Clinicians

Medical interest in the notation first developed in Italy in the 1960s, where it was used on a research project to analyse the movements of cerebral palsy patients, but it was not until the late next decade that a group of English physiotherapists became interested in its clinical value. Since then a small nucleus of therapists based mainly in the UK, Sweden, and Japan have studied and used the system in the clinical field and appreciated its potential as a clinical tool.

Clinicians can use BMN as:

- a recording tool for 'shop floor' assessment and reassessment
- a research tool, either alone or in conjunction with instrumentation methods, to record clinical findings
- a teaching tool to provide a systematic approach for the observation of movement and the conversion of the information into clinical analyses of both functional and dysfunctional movements seen in the clinical field

As a written language of movement, in the same way that musical notation is a written language of music, Benesh Movement Notation has the same international value as sheet music. It is, therefore, a language which enables the communication of movement regardless of differences in spoken language.



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Example 1

Bracing to C2
AFO D - 3 1/2

The diagram shows a vertical line on a four-line staff. The top line has a vertical tick mark. The second line has a '+' sign on the left and an 'x' on the right. The third line has a '+' sign on the left and a '+' sign on the right. The bottom line has a '1' centered below it. To the right of the diagram is a black and white photograph of a young child standing.

A five-year-old girl with moderate cerebral palsy.

Example 2

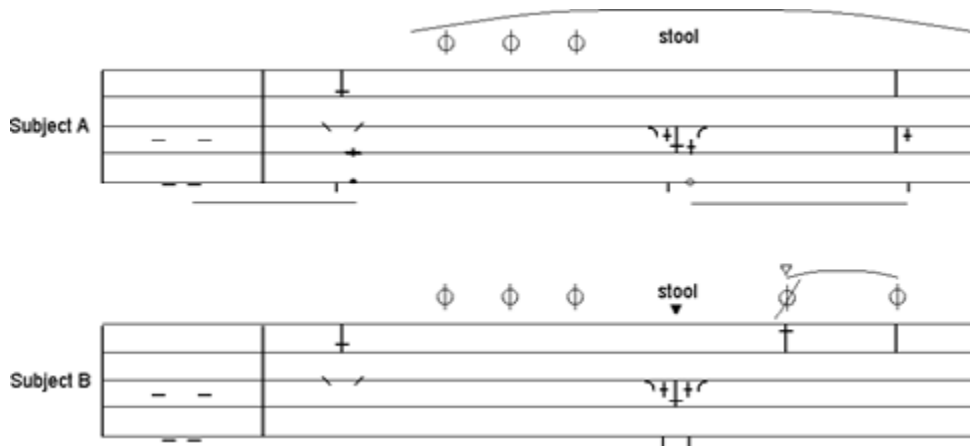
V slow

The diagram shows a horizontal line on a four-line staff. The top line has a small square symbol. The second line has a '+' sign on the left and a '+' sign on the right. The third line has a '+' sign on the left and a '+' sign on the right. The bottom line has a '1 1/2' marker on the left and a '1 1/2' marker on the right. The diagram is labeled 'V slow' at the top left.

This example analyses a gait cycle.

Example 3

Two different subjects, who are both standing upright, have been asked to place their hands upon the side of their waist and sit down slowly.



Subject A

This subject demonstrates a well co-ordinated and very smooth movement from standing into sitting. The movement goes as follows:

The head tilts interiorly so that the face is directed obliquely downwards. At the same time, the hands are placed on the waist and the right foot slides posteriorly so that the right knee bends very slightly. This carries the body weight posteriorly to fall between the two feet and increases the anteroposterior dimension of the supporting base – thus preparing the subject to be able to control the balance during the next stage of the movement.

The subject then lowers the pelvis onto the stool very slowly to a count of four evenly spaced intervals. As this occurs, the pelvis rolls forward over the hip joints and the left lower limb takes up a right angle at the knee whilst the right lower limb is more acutely flexed and the foot is posterior to the knee but anterior to the coronal plane of the body.

Finally, the right foot slides forward to lie immediately under the right knee and so makes the knee adopt a right angle. At the same time, the pelvis rolls posteriorly to become upright over the hip joints and so creates a right angle between the pelvis and thigh. Concurrently, the head regains the normal upright posture. The hands are still on the lateral aspect of the waist and the whole action has occurred completely smoothly.

Subject B

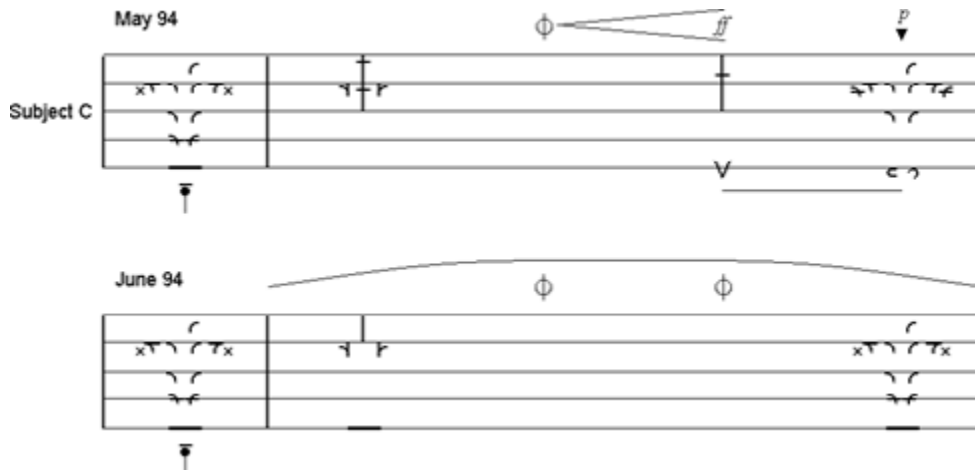
This subject demonstrates poor control of the movement and associated balance reactions. The movement is as follows: The head tilts forwards in the same way as Subject A and the hands are placed on the lateral aspect of the waist. However, there is no adjustment of the feet to make the anteroposterior dimension of the base more suitable and the knees remain straight with the weight passing evenly between the feet which are both immediately under the body and in alignment with its coronal plane.

The subject then remains poised like this for three evenly spaced intervals and then suddenly drops the pelvis onto the stool, virtually collapsing at the knees and hips. The 'landing' is noisy and sudden, no balance adjustment of the trunk occurs and the body does not incline anteriorly at the hips.

Finally, the head is tilted posteriorly on the trunk momentarily before being adjusted to the normal upright posture. The final posture is identical to that of Subject A, but the method of attaining it is much more hazardous and traumatic.

Example 4

Two recordings of a 'press up' exercise made during a treatment programme. The recordings are one month apart. The same subject is being recorded in order to monitor progress.



The subject is prone lying with the head turned to the left and resting on the right side of the face. The shoulders and hips are supported by the floor. The hands are on the floor at shoulder height and are lateral to the shoulder joints. The elbows are flexed, lie posterior to the coronal plane of the body and are abducted but not to shoulder height. They are not supported by the floor. This posture conditions wrist extension, forearm pronation and elbow flexion of a more acute angle than a right angle. The knees are together, very slightly flexed and supported by the floor, thus the metatarso-phalangeal joints are extended. The movement goes as follows:

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The elbows extend, pushing the upper trunk away from the floor, but the pelvis remains where it was in the starting posture. Thus there is an acute extension of the trunk on the pelvis (probably in the lumbar region) and the cervical spine is acutely extended and not rotated. The hands lie anterior to the shoulders.

The subject then makes a supreme effort to get the pelvis off the floor, but can only achieve this by flexing the hip joints so that the feet are no longer in alignment with the trunk but lie anterior to it. The trunk is no longer extended on the pelvis and the cervical spine is flexed as if the subject is trying to see if the pelvis has come off the floor.

Finally, the subject collapses noisily onto the floor again, the elbows buckle into flexion and rest on the floor, the feet slide as the hips fall into extension. The thighs roll into lateral rotation so that the feet are turned outwards. The head rests on the side of the face again so that it is rotated to the left – as in the starting posture. The subject goes limp; the entire activity cannot be called smooth or well co-ordinated and has exhausted the subject.

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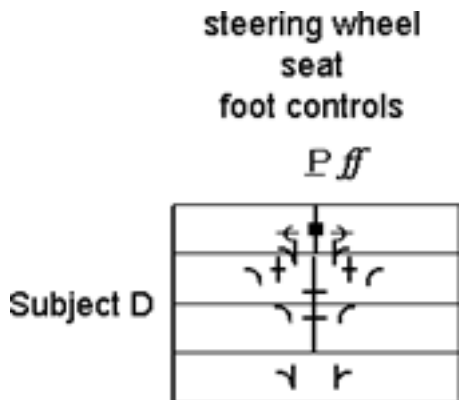
The performance of the subject is now excellent. The starting posture is the same as in the first recording, but the ensuing movement is smooth and demonstrates strength and coordination.

The elbows extend and the head, trunk, pelvis and knees are raised from the floor. As this occurs, the knees, which are very slightly flexed, pass into full extension and the subject is supported by his hands and the balls of his feet only. The body is inclined in a straight line and the head is no longer rotated to the left, but is in alignment with the rest of the body.

The subject then returns to the starting position smoothly within three evenly spaced intervals. There is no sudden collapse and no appearance of exhaustion at the end of the movement.

Example 5

This is an example of a static posture adopted by the driver of a car.



The posture could be the cause of considerable discomfort if maintained for any length of time. If it is not the result of stress, it could eventually cause this and so make the driver more accident prone. The posture is as follows:

The driver is sitting on the seat of the car, but his pelvis has rolled posteriorly, extending his hips. The trunk has flexed over the pelvis so that the vertebral column is compressed anteriorly and the cervical spine is lordosed so that the chin pokes forward on an extended atlanto-occipital joint and flexed lower cervical spine.

The lower limbs are extended at the knees and are supported by the foot controls of the vehicle. This knee posture may be responsible for the posture of the spine through the tension on the hamstring muscle group and may, in turn, be caused by the incorrect adjustment of the relationship of the seat to the foot controls and steering wheel.

The upper limbs are flexed at the elbows and the hands are gripping each side of the steering wheel very tightly with the wrists flexed.

The back is not fully supported, as the scapular area has been brought away from the support of the seat by the flexion of the trunk. Apart from being a posture of musculoskeletal discomfort, this posture will restrict respiration, stretch the hamstring muscles and possibly also the sciatic nerve, may cause root pressure in the cervical region, leading to severe head and neck aches and may interfere with the conductivity of the nerves arising from the brachial plexus. There will be disc pressure in the lumbar region with possible subsequent back pain and nerve root pressure in the lumbosacral regions.

All in all, this posture is a body language which may be the result of physical or emotional problems or of vehicle design. Whatever the initial cause, profound physical effects will result if it is adopted for extended periods.

Other components of the subject's clinical assessment will determine where the main cause lies:

- in the car?
- in seat adjustment?
- in primary stress?
- in the fatigue of the driver?

All factors need investigation to isolate the cause of the posture and so enable appropriate steps to be taken to alleviate the situation.