Assistive Technology
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Assistive technology is making use of any device that will help the disabled person to reach their educational, social, vocational, and living potential. There are both low (non-electronically based) and high (electronically based) systems. Use of the technology has a great impact upon the disabled person, however, it is only a tool, and must depend upon the commitment of the individual to make it work.

Introduction

Assistive technology is the use of any device to enable the disabled person to reach the goal of attaining full life potential considering the disabiling condition. It is comprised of low technology – the use of non-electronic measures, and high technology – the use of electronic and computer assisted measures. It is a rapidly changing field; as technology evolves, so does assistive technology.

Assistive technology is the use of any device that will enable persons with disabilities to function to their maximum potential – educationally, vocationally, socially, and in daily living activities. This includes both low and high technology applications. Low technology refers to any apparatus that is either non-electronically-based or simple battery operated items (e.g., adapted toys and tape recorders). High technology involves the use of sophisticated systems that are electronically-based (e.g., power wheelchairs and environmental control systems). Implementation of this technology should include an analysis of the person’s goals, needs, abilities and potential capabilities. Through a comprehensive evaluation, the most appropriate assistive technology can be selected and matched to the individual. It still remains, however, only a tool. Effective use is only achieved when the individual can independently and successfully implement the use of the technology. This can involve custom modifications, extensive training and ongoing assessment by a team of individuals who may include, but are not limited to, the person with a disability, family members, teachers, employer, occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech/language pathologist, psychologist, rehabilitation engineer, and/or physician.
Assistive technology is changing rapidly due to advances in computer technology and equipment design. When recommending or selecting assistive technology it is critical to know what is available, its features, its expandability, how it compares with other similar devices, and its application for individuals with disabilities. It is difficult to stay abreast of a specific area of assistive technology and virtually impossible to know the entire field. To maintain one's knowledge base, several strategies can be employed.

**Strategies for Maintaining an Assistive Technology Knowledge Base**

There are a number of basic strategies for the rehabilitation therapist to maintain his or her expertise in this area. All of these should be utilized.

- Attend conferences and workshops on assistive technology.
  - Spend quality time at the various exhibit booths - operate the device on a basic level.
  - Attend workshops that provide an opportunity for hands-on experience.
- Maintain your name and address on the manufacturer's vendors' mailing list.
- Maintain your name and address on the newsletter publication lists of manufacturers.
- Subscribe to assistive technology newsletters and publications.
- Obtain assistive technology videotapes from manufacturers universities and organizations.
- Review assistive technology databases and bulletin boards.
- Obtain product information from assistive technology databases on computer disks and/or CD-ROM.
- Read textbooks on assistive technology.
- Verify that any assistive technology described in textbooks or other publications are still being manufactured.