

PRESCRIBING EQUIPMENT IN PEDIATRICS

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There are many considerations in the process of prescribing equipment for the pediatric client including financial, professional, practical, emotional, psychological, and contextual. For the child and the family the equipment will become an integral part of their lives that will hopefully enhance their ability to participate in their community. The potential exists to dramatically enhance the quality of life, decrease the amount of effort, and increase the level of satisfaction for the family on a daily basis. Therapists as prescribers play an integral role in determining what equipment will be chosen. As such, they must ensure that due diligence is employed in the pursuit of addressing the family's goals. This diligence would also extend to being accountable for the vast sums of money that are allocated for equipment by governments and other funding agencies.

Pediatric Foundations

Therapists who work with pediatric clients are well acquainted with the unique set of circumstances surrounding the provision of care to someone's child. If that child requires equipment in order to function it means that someone's future has altered along the way. By the time the equipment is recommended, much has already transpired in terms of emotion, acceptance and adapting to a world that therapy is now a large part of. A unique relationship can be forged between therapists and caregivers based on trust and a shared desire to see the child have access to all that they need to achieve their goals (1). When the time comes for equipment to play a role in achieving these goals, it is often therapists that are the main resource for families. Some families have access to resources of their own and know what they want for their child, and the therapist can assist the family in acquiring what they need. In either circumstance the therapist must have sufficient knowledge of what is available in order to be able to recommend and prescribe appropriate equipment. The responsibilities of therapists can be summed up in three points. First, the therapist must know the client and their goals. Second, the therapist must know what options are available in order to know what will work best for their client. Third, families must be offered a choice as well as an opinion. (2)

Pitfalls and Habits

The clinician's level of experience and exposure to equipment are key factors affecting the degree of confidence they have in recommending equipment. The three key responsibilities outlined above can help the clinician to avoid some of the pitfalls and habits that can affect the choices offered to families. Funding is always a concern and can present a roadblock to examining certain choices. The dilemma arises when there is something that a clinician believes will work best but knows that it may be beyond the financial resources of the family. Do we show the family something that they may not be able to afford? If it is conceivable that funding may be acquired through extra work or

non-traditional sources families should be shown the choices so they can make the decision, and the clinician can help guide the family through the process.

Clinicians can become very comfortable with a certain piece of equipment having had success with past clients. This choice may indeed be a good option for the next client, but it may not be the best for the family. Certain options and features may be significant to a family given their lifestyle. The clinician must be familiar with what options are available. This can only be achieved through exposure and education. It is incumbent upon clinicians and their employers to allot time for inservices, equipment demonstrations or fairs. The benefits of this are twofold: the clinician will be better able to offer choices, and more responsible decisions can be made regarding accessories that can significantly increase the cost.

Equipment dealers can be a clinician's best friend and resource when it comes to equipment. They often possess in depth knowledge of equipment features and functions. Clinicians, as the prescribers, need to be at least aware of what is available in order to make an informed decision regarding what is offered to the family, and work with dealers to ensure that appropriate clinical options are offered.

Key principles

One way to ensure that a proper and more objective decision is being made regarding equipment choice is to follow an external guideline undergirded by the guiding principle of knowing your client and goals. When choosing a piece of equipment there are seven areas of consideration that can assist the clinician in knowing that they have done their due diligence. Below are the "A through G"s of equipment considerations.

Appropriate: Does the equipment achieve the desired outcome, and is it adaptable to potential changes.

Budget: Is the acquisition of the desired equipment viable given the budgetary possibilities?

Context: Will the equipment be functional in the variety of contexts that it may be required in, i.e. School, home, community, travel considerations.

Dependability: Does the quality of the equipment indicate that it will be dependable over a long period of time. Does it have a good track record and warranty considerations?

Ease of Use: Will the caregivers be able to easily apply the equipment and perform fitting adjustments?

Family Considerations: Has the family made the informed choice for the equipment that will meet their needs and fit their lifestyle?

Growth: Does the equipment have sufficient growth capabilities to meet the client's needs over a reasonable period of time.

Letters of Support

The end of this process may involve writing a letter requesting funding assistance, depending on the region and the funding source being approached. For some, this can be an arduous task and time consuming. Writing an effective funding letter can be made easier by following an outline of key elements, drawing upon resources that already exist, and incorporating the principles previously outlined. Various manufacturers provided outlines that can be of great assistance.

Key Elements of an Effective Funding Letter (3)

1. Describe who you are and what is being requested.
2. Identify your credentials, experience and relationship to client.
3. Explain the client's condition.
4. Discuss the impact of the condition on the client's life, noting the limitations and abilities (without the equipment being requested). Tell the client's story.
5. Identify the equipment and accessories being requested.
6. Describe the equipment, adjustments for growth and potential progress, social and emotional benefits.
7. Describe why the equipment is necessary, and how it will result in an increase of function and participation.

Conclusion

Equipment has the potential to be life-changing for the pediatric client and family. The right equipment is one that the family has chosen to be best suited to their needs and desires. Prescribing therapists are tasked with facilitating this successful outcome, and must have the tools and educational opportunities to be effective, comprehensive and accountable. Therapists should be given time to learn about what equipment is available, its features and accessories, and the various clinical applications. Attendance at clinically oriented inservices, equipment fairs and demonstrations are all viable options that will lead to positive results.

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Speaker Bio

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