

Abstract

The increasing availability of electronic technology in the home, school and workplace has enhanced popular awareness of its potential for countering impairment, be it congenital or following on from illness or injury. People with disabilities can be enabled to realise a greater potential, to develop greater independence and to become less dependent on others.

The rapidity of technological progress has outpaced the ability of the National Health Service to safely deliver an effective, integrated provision. This Report highlights current difficulties and makes recommendations to healthcare commissioners which offer real opportunity to promote and develop efficient, cost effective and equitable services nationwide. It builds upon and complements the Audit Commission's Report on the Provision of Equipment to Older or Disabled People by the NHS and Social Services in England and Wales. (1)

Key recommendations arising from this report are:

1. Electronic Assistive Technology (EAT) should be available equitably, appropriately and in a manner which is both efficient and cost-effective. Its provision should follow on from total disability assessment and should be considered a specialist component of Rehabilitation Medicine
2. Comprehensive holistic assessment necessitates that a potential user's problems are properly identified and delineated. Whilst this may often be possible at a local level, complex problems demand that dedicated medical, scientific and technological, and therapy expertise should be available at a network of specialist centres. These centres should relate to local services on a "hub and spoke" basis.
3. Service delivery should be timely and appropriate. It should be overseen from each hub by specialist personnel who should adopt responsibility for equipment procurement, provision and maintenance. Working closely with locally based professional colleagues they should promote the effective, efficient and safe usage of EAT.
4. Technological advances necessitate that professional organisations such as the British Society of Rehabilitation Medicine, the Institute of Physics & Engineering in Medicine, the College of Occupational Therapists and the Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists work together and with healthcare commissioners to refine strategic objectives, to develop common integrated patterns of service delivery and to actively promote research and professional training.
5. There is need to define and establish national standards for the provision of EAT with accredited regional centres collaborating one with another to develop evidence based practice and oversee service delivery.

End of Abstract

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