



Best Practices for Vendors of Assistive Technology

"Assistive technology vendors make a big contribution to the quality of life of people with disabilities through high quality, consumer-responsive products and services." *Dan Bunting, Midwest Association of Medical Equipment Suppliers*

Vendors of assistive technology provide products and services with the needs and welfare of people with disabilities as their primary concern.

Vendors of assistive technology are specialists who provide technology to meet the specific needs of people with disabilities in areas including but not limited to:

- wheeled mobility
- seated and alternative positioning
- ambulation equipment
- augmented communication
- environmental control systems
- activities of daily living
- job accommodation
- adaptation of equipment
- transportation
- sensory aids

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology or habilitation equipment is distinguished from other durable medical equipment in that it is generally:

- specified in response to information gathered through a team-based assessment and evaluation. In addition to the vendor, this team may include a physician, physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech/language specialist, nurse, teacher, and other relevant rehabilitation professionals. Input from the customer, family, employer, and other primary care providers, who are integral team members, is of utmost importance

- ordered to meet the individual customer's specific needs and wishes, taking into account current and long-term costs, the context of use, and maintenance and repair requirements
- as needed, customized, adapted, or fabricated from additional components by the vendor to best meet the customer's specific needs.

Qualifications of Vendors

Vendors must have knowledge of anatomy, physiology, disabling conditions, and disease processes relevant to the technical aspects of the equipment they provide.

In order to gain and maintain this knowledge, vendors will regularly engage in self-guided study and/or attend courses, seminars, trade shows, and other continuing education activities. Vendors support and participate in the efforts of habilitation organizations to improve vendor services.

Vendors recognize the need for, and actively pursue, communication and interaction with other vendors. The goals of these interactions are to:

- maintain the standards of professionalism necessary for continued participation as respected team members
- increase the awareness of services and products
- improve overall product quality
- enhance product and service development in the field
- communicate with and educate local funding agencies and insurance carriers.

Responsibilities as a Team Member

Vendors strongly support the team approach to the provision of assistive technology. As team members, their primary responsibilities are to:

- actively solicit information from the customer, family, physician, employer, physical therapist, occupational therapist, and other medical or educational personnel, regarding the customer's physical, functional, and associated needs, as well as the specific goals to be met by the assistive technology
- in close consultation with the referring health or habilitation professional(s), the customer, customer's family, and other primary care providers, explain the appropriate choices of commercially available and custom-fabricated equipment which would meet the specified needs
- use objective criteria and comparisons to assist the team in choosing among the options available; using appropriate instruments and techniques, participate in

measurements of the customer and of living and work areas, to assure the proper fit and function of the equipment

- deliver, fit and adjust the prescribed equipment
- actively encourage the team to review the equipment to assure that it meets the goals and objectives as specified
- instruct the customer, family employer, teacher, and team in the proper use, maintenance, and repair of, and significance of insurance to, the equipment provided
 - (Will insurance pay for repairs? When is the consumer eligible to purchase replacement equipment?).

Vendors base their recommendations solely on the customer's needs as outlined by the team, and on the desires of the customer, family, employer, and other primary care providers. They strive to meet the goals and objectives specified by the team in the most cost-effective manner.

Help with the Financing Process

Vendors inform the customer, family, and/or employer of their financial obligations and of requirements for reimbursement through third-party agencies and insurance carriers, to assure proper and timely prior authorization and ordering of equipment. When appropriate, they inform the customer, family and employer of alternative funding sources.

Assistance in Purchase Decisions

Vendors provide equipment comparable to that being purchased for demonstration or trial use. Referrals to current users of specific or comparable equipment are provided on request.

On-Going Support and Service

Vendors provide long-term service and support for the equipment they sell through knowledgeable, skilled, highly trained service personnel. They maintain an adequate inventory of replacement parts to provide timely service and repair of all equipment supplied. Vendors provide a written estimate of cost and time required for any repair

work. During the repair period, they make available loaner equipment comparable to the original equipment.

Vendors provide a specific, written statement of warranty on the equipment provided, including commercial warranties on manufactured equipment or 4 components, and dealer warranties on adapted or custom-fabricated items. Guaranteed response time for repairs should also be included with equipment warranties.

Vendors maintain adequate levels of professional liability insurance. When they are involved in the design, fabrication, or substantial modification of commercially available equipment, they also maintain appropriate levels of product liability insurance.

Quality Assurance Standards

Vendors utilize written quality assurance standards. These procedures include, but are not limited to:

- reviewing the procedures utilized in integrating custom-designed and fabricated equipment with commercially manufactured equipment, to assure compatibility and safety
- understanding the properties of the materials used in custom designed and modified equipment to assure long-term durability; and
- documenting the goals and objectives set by the team, as well as the short- and long-term effectiveness of the equipment in meeting those goals and objectives.

Vendors will provide consumer or professional references, upon request.

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