





Assistive Technology: why 'mainstreaming' matters

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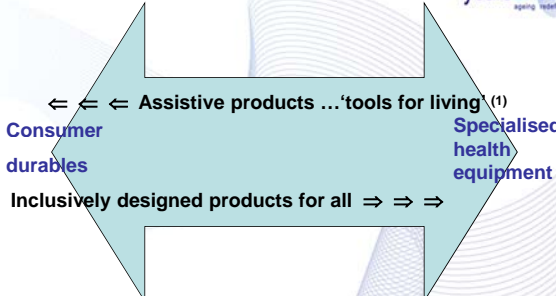


My objectives:

- To make the case that it's vital for 'AT' to be more widely available and used readily, as part of our daily lives.
 - Put AT in context
 - Reflect on our history
 - Consider the present
 - Look to the future




Putting AT in context...



Consumer durables
Inclusively designed products for all

Assistive products ... 'tools for living' ⁽¹⁾

Specialised health equipment




Where does AT come from?

- Given that we naturally use tools to help us to what we want to do – why is AT different? What's the mystique?
 - In UK - the origins of our modern history of AT are in rehabilitation – mobilising soldiers after the 1st and 2nd world wars.
 - Province of medics, health professionals, rehabilitation engineers and health scientists



Associations and complications

- Associated with ill health, trauma and frailty ⁽²⁾
- Language and words we use to describe AT
 - Medical devices...disability equipment....assistive technology....technical aids...products for easy living....
- Complex systems of supply
 - Mandelstam cites aids and equipment as “the single most confused area of service provision for disabled people” ^(3,4)



Leading to the present day

- Since 1993 DH has published guidance and developed policy in this area
- The AT market has developed in response to state supply systems
- Disabled and older people want to be able to 'get on with their lives' ⁽⁵⁾ ...
- Demand growing, but not enough resources available to meet it
- Need to start planning for the future

The difference that AT can make



- 'Better living in the Years Ahead study' in 2008 ⁽⁶⁾ – aimed to find out more about the public's attitudes, experiences and behaviours relating to purchasing AT.
 - Over 1000 people in 5 locations in England
 - 40- 85+, ½ sample aged 40 - 60
 - 64% were women, 30% lived in single person households or sheltered accommodation
 - All were experiencing difficulties due to ageing or looking after someone who was
 - Series of focus groups

The difference that AT can make



- Findings include:
 - 2/3^{ds} said they would rather stay at home than move in with relatives or assisted accommodation
 - Only 15% of people experiencing difficulties with everyday activities would *automatically* think of using AT
- AND YET...
 - 95% of people who *had bought* such products found them helpful or very helpful

Influences and barriers



- Only 1/3rd had acquired a product -70% purchase, 30% acquired free from LA
- Advice sought by 44% of people purchasing
 - 30% currently find out about products via health professionals
- 42% who had NOT purchased said they were likely to consider purchasing
- Barriers to purchasing include stigma / negative associations
- Main influences – making life easier and safer

So what does Joe Public say?



Looking forward...



- Life expectancy is growing, we are keeping healthier and independent for longer...
- BUT:
- The fastest growing part of our population is 85+;
 - We have a challenge in how we pay for - and look after ourselves - when we're very old and our health is compromised
 - Health professionals have a vital role to play in facilitating change

Change is already underway



- Retailers are already selling 'tools for living' and are interested in expanding the 50+ market
- Inclusive design movement is leading to better products for all
- The internet is changing everything!

Why does mainstreaming matter?



- It will help to:
 - Address the stigma associated with using products
 - Make them 'normal' so that we use them as a matter of course as our needs change
 - Keeping us independent and active for longer
 - Make them affordable and readily available
 - Prepare younger generations for managing ageing process

In summary



- Legacy of former ideas about health and social care
- Never been easy – now even less so
- Must look to the future and make the most of AT
- Now in a period of transition
- Healthcare professionals have a vital part to play in sharing their knowledge so that we can all take control of our lives

References:



1. Prof Heinz Wolff – 'Tools for Living'
<http://www.heinzwolff.co.uk/>
2. Conference report "Who's for an Easier Life", *OT News*, May 1996
3. Mandelstam M. How to get Equipment for Disability 1992, Jessica Kingsley London
4. Beardshaw, V, Last on the List 1988, pp 27,28 Kings Fund, London
5. Winchcombe, M, Getting on with our lives, 2004, Disabled Living Manchester
6. Better living in the Years Ahead study, 2008, www.yearsahead.co.uk