Augmentative and Alternative Communication
An Introduction

What is Assistive Technology?
“...any item, piece of equipment or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities”
(Idea 04 Section 602)

What is Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)?
• An area of research, clinical and educational practice
  • for persons with severe disorders of speech-language production and/or comprehension
  • Supplementing or replacing natural speech for
  • temporary or permanent basis for impairments,
  • activity limitations,
  • and participation restrictions
(Asha, 2002)

Incidence of Population with AAC
• 1.3% of population in America
  • About 3.5 million people
  • All 15 years or older
• 1.5% of the population in Canada
  • All 4 years or older

Incidence
• Blackstone (1990) suggest that the following have severe difficulty communicating and require the assistance of an AAC system:
  • .2% - .6% of school age children
• Hirdes et.al (1993)
  • .8% of adults 45 to 54 years old
  • 4.2% of adults 85 and older

Age Distribution of AAC Users
(Australia; Bloomberg & Johnson, 1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in Years</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>9.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>12.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-17</td>
<td>15.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>8.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>22-40</td>
<td>26.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>41-60</td>
<td>9.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>17.9</td>
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What is communication?

- The National Joint Committee for the Communicative Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities defined communication as:
  - “Any act by which a person gives to or receives from another person information about that person’s needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states.
  - Communication may be intentional or unintentional, may involve conventional or unconventional signals, may take linguistic or non linguistic forms and may occur through spoken or other modes.” (1992, p2).

AAC needs to be multi-model and may include

- Gestures
- Facial expressions
- Sign
- Verbalizations
- Braille
- Key boards
- Photographs
- Objects
- Line drawings
- Printed words
- Low to high technical aids or devices

Four Components of AAC System

- Symbol - a representation of a concept (could be visual, auditory, or tactile)
- Aid - another word for device or the actual physical item an individual uses to assist their communication
- Technique - the way the message is relayed
- Strategy - the ways to improve or enhance a message (i.e. timing, grammar formulation, communication rate)

Purpose for Interacting with Others

- Expression of wants/needs
- Information transfer
- Social Closeness
- Social etiquette
- Conduct inter dialogue

Competencies

- Linguistic Competence
  - Skills in one’s native language
- Operational Competence
  - Skills to utilize and operate an AAC system
- Social Competence
  - Understanding the social interactions needed for conversation
- Strategic Competence
  - Skills to overcome difficulties during conversation

Competent Communicators exhibit the following:

- Positive self-image
- Shows an interest in the conversation
- Initiates conversation
- Making relevant comments, asking partner-focused questions, and negotiating shared topics
- Put partners at ease (i.e. introduce system)
### Funding
- Medicare
- Medicaid
- Third party Payer
  - Private insurance
  - Organization
- Out of pocket

### Assessment
- Participation Model
- SETT framework

### Additional Considerations for adults
- Is the difficulty
  - On going
  - New onset
  - Progressive
- Where is the individual currently?
  - Placement in the near future

### Additional Considerations for adults
- Are changes in lifestyle to occur
  - Change in residence
  - Change in employment
  - Frequency of seeing friends
  - Independence
  - Communication patterns

### The Experience of AAC
- Isolation/socialization
- Frustration
- Employment
- Connection to others

### References