Using Technology to Communicate After a Traumatic Brain Injury

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Abstract: After receiving a Traumatic Brain Injury secondary to a motorcycle accident in 1982, David was left with severe physical disabilities, including no ability to communicate verbally. David is now working with his second computerized communication device. This session will demonstrate how David uses this device to communicate, as well as to access control over his environments – even to gain computer access! In addition, the progress of alternative communication systems over the past 20 years will be briefly reviewed.

Introduction

Dave, at the age of 20, was involved in a motorcycle accident on April 25, 1982. He received a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) in the accident, and as a result was in a coma for almost 1 year. He spent the next 9 years in nursing homes, during which time he worked very hard to re-learn how to eat, swallow, sit up, and even move any part of his body. Despite his determination and hard work, Dave remained hemiplegic, hemiparetic, aphasic, and non-verbal.

When he was finally able to come home from the nursing home in 1991, he was able to purchase an augmented communication device to assist with communicating his daily needs. The use of a dynamic screen on his new Dynavox accommodated for Dave’s memory loss associated with the TBI. The Dynavox enabled Dave to tell his story of being institutionalized in a nursing home at the age of 20. He has shared this story with others who have sustained TBIs, at conferences, and support group meetings. In addition he has testified before the Ohio General Assembly as well as his Congressman in D.C., in favor of various TBI bills.

Dave has now received the newest version of the Dynavox. With updates in technology, the new Dynavox now enables Dave to not only communicate, but to access his environment. He can control the television, VCR, stereo, lights, and is working on accessing the computer and Internet via the Dynavox.

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology is an assortment of devices, equipment, software, and services that are designed to assist people with disabilities enjoy greater degrees of integration and participation in their communities and environments. Assistive technology can be used in the areas of mobility, positioning and seating, environmental control, recreation, activities of daily living, vision, hearing, communication, learning and studying, reading, and computer access. Assistive technology can be high tech or low tech, but is designed to meet the needs at hand.

Assistive Technology Resources


Closing the Gap [www.closingthegap.com]

Family Center on Technology and Disability [www.fctd.info]

Special Education Technology Practice [www.setp.net]

Technology and Media Division of Council for Exceptional Children [www.tamcec.org]