

Selecting the Right Mobility Products for Long Term Care Residents

Moving to a long term care home can be an overwhelming experience. Everything is different—the people, the surroundings and the schedules for meals, baths, medications and social activities. It is a time of enormous change and adjustment and the last thing new residents need is an issue surrounding mobility.

Many residents entering a long term care home still enjoy full mobility. Others require some type of mobility device—a cane, walker or manual or power wheelchair. Still others may be in transition from a walker to a wheelchair. For residents who need a mobility device, time is critical in ensuring they receive the proper equipment to maximize their independence and quality of life and, where appropriate, to support them in their ongoing physical rehabilitation.

Matching mobility equipment to resident needs

Typically, the long term care home's professional health care team—a doctor, nursing staff and occupational therapist or physio-therapist—collectively determines the need for a mobility device and arranged for a formal assessment. The role of the home medical equipment specialist is to assist the resident, therapist and family caregiver to choose the device best suited to the needs of the resident.

Once the need has been identified, the next step for the home medical equipment specialist is to assist the therapist in the assessment process by providing the necessary trial equipment, with the features and benefits that are best suited to the resident.

by Susan Tarrant

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When providing input regarding the features of a mobility device, home medical equipment specialists also consider the resident's possible future needs and goals. Many devices are expensive to purchase and should therefore provide many years of use. When assisting the resident and therapist in making their decision, the home medical equipment specialist considers the resident's medical history, the type of equipment required, seating needs and surroundings/accessibility.

Medical history

Is the resident's physical condition stable or is it likely to change? Why does the resident need the equipment? Is it due to a stroke, a fall, arthritis or Parkinson's disease? Is there a risk for skin breakdown? Is the resident capable of weight shifting? Is the resident taking medication that may affect mobility?

Type of equipment

Is there a need for an ambulation aid, cane, walker or wheelchair?

Seating needs

Does the resident have skeletal deformities? Is off-the-shelf seating suitable or is there a need for specialized products customized to fit the resident's particular physiology? Is there a risk of pressure ulcers? If so, the seat cushion and back support prescribed should provide proper weight distribution and pressure relief to reduce the risk of swelling or ulcers.

Surroundings/accessibility

What are the characteristics of the resident's personal surroundings and those of the wider long term care home environment? The home medical equipment specialist will consider the layout of room furniture, width of hallways, access to the bathroom, seating arrangements in the dining room and activity room and so on. When family members or caregivers take the resident out of the home for the day, are they able to store the equipment in the trunk of their vehicle or easily transfer the resident from a wheelchair to a car or mini-van?

A wheelchair that is the right width and height, provides a manageable footprint and has the right type of seating system—is the seat soft and easily removed or is it a solid-back seat requiring more effort to manipulate before the chair can be folded?—will make a resident's surroundings accessible without limiting his or her mobility.

What does the home medical equipment supplier bring to the table?

Based on the outcome of the patient assessment by the therapist and home medical equipment specialist, it is sometimes necessary to provide a piece of trial equipment that is set up specifically for the resident. 'Test driving' a piece of equipment ensures the resident receives the right product.

Once the piece of equipment is deemed suitable, education on its proper use and maintenance is provided to the resident, family members and/or caregivers and long term care staff.

Some provinces have funding programs in place to partially fund equipment purchases. The home medical equipment specialist can help residents and/or family members access available funding.

After a device is purchased, the home medical equipment specialist will follow up to determine if any adjustments are necessary. He or she will also make sure the resident is using the mobility device properly and will ascertain the resident's level of satisfaction with the purchase.

The home medical equipment specialist will organize regular maintenance and necessary repairs as required.

The right fit

Wheelchairs, walkers and canes come in a variety of sizes and offer a variety of features. Proper measurement and fit are the key to function, comfort, accessibility and resident independence. By matching equipment to an individual's needs—both current and future—the home medical equipment specialist can help to maximize a resident's independence and quality of life. **LTC**