



QUALIFICATIONS: Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices

Clinical Practice Recommendation from the VHA Handbook states the Qualifications are:

"Prescriptions and requests for special function and/or communication electronic devices will be developed by the speech pathologist. The special needs of each patient will be documented to clearly establish that the special function device provides superior performance over any of the more common and conventional appliances."

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to "an area of clinical, research, and educational practice for speech-language pathologists and audiologists that attempts to compensate and facilitate, temporarily or permanently, for the impairment and disability patterns of individuals with severe expressive, and/or language comprehension disorders. AAC may be required for individuals demonstrating impairments in gestural, spoken, and/or written modes of communication."(ASHA, 1990)

All of the following specific requirements must be met:

- Complete evaluation by Assistive Technology (AT) clinician that identifies the communication deficit(s) that impair functional communication.
 - Speech/language and communication impairments can be caused by stroke, traumatic brain injury, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's disease, ALS/Lou Gehrig's disease or other neurological/neuromuscular disorders.
- The use of AAC devices would improve patient's ability to participate and communicate effectively in activities of daily living.
- Able to cognitively and physically use an AAC device safely and effectively.
- Have visual and auditory skills needed to see and hear device to use it safely and effectively
- Able to use AAC device independently or with assistance from caregiver for set-up.
- Patient or caregiver will be able to provide adequate care of device.

PROCESS:

A. Referral

1. Patient identifies interest in alternative and augmentative equipment.
2. Patient will need a referral to Speech Therapy from a provider, whether it is a physician, physician's assistant (PA) or nurse practitioner (NP) who is providing care.
3. Once consult has been placed, a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) will schedule an appointment in the Assistive Technology (AT) clinic within 7 days.
4. The SLP will submit appropriate AT consult for assistance from AT team with set-up of equipment.

B. Evaluation Process: Roles and responsibilities of SLP

- Recognize the needs and interests of individuals who may benefit from AAC devices
- Assess cognition, language, speech/voice, behavior, motor movement and family/caregiver support
- Trial patient on various devices to determine which device is most appropriate for patient.
- Determine most appropriate access method in conjunction with AAC devices
- Discuss recommendations and treatment plan



C. The following education will be provided:

- VA policy regarding use and care of AAC devices and access equipment
- Safe and appropriate use of equipment
- Information regarding maintenance and repair procedures
- Patient's responsibility for recurring utility charges (i.e. home internet access)

D. Follow-up

1. Once equipment has arrived in speech clinic, SLP will schedule appointment for pick-up/training or equipment will be mailed to patient's address on file
2. Training will be provided by AAC device vendor in the patient's home or by the SLP in the speech clinic.
3. SLP will provide the patient with contact information for future questions and concerns.

