

## Technology Present Meets Insurance Past: Everybody Loses

Recently, I came across a story on the Web about a double amputee who received the latest in medical technology: an artificial leg that was able to detect when he was going to step off a curb. The leg had six sensors in the kneecap that detected different surfaces and different slopes and acted more like a normal leg than current mass-produced artificial limbs.

It is worth noting that this gentleman lost both his legs in the Iraq War and was being treated by the Veterans Administration at Walter Reed Hospital. The military is currently developing an artificial arm that works like a real arm. Why are these technological advancements both military based? It's because the military has the money and is spending it to develop new artificial limbs regardless of cost.

In the world of health insurance, things are different. Johnson and Johnson announced in February that they would stop manufacturing the IBOT. The IBOT is a revolutionary wheelchair designed by Dean Kamen (the inventor who also developed the Segaway) and licensed to Johnson and Johnson for manufacturing. The chair cost \$23,000 and was not covered by either Medicare/Medicaid or private insurance. Advocates for the device thought that it would have sold much better had it been approved by CMS (Centers for Medicare/Medicaid Services) for reimbursement. Without insurance reimbursement, the cost of the chair for most people with disabilities was prohibitive.

The devices described above are just the beginning of a technological revolution in the development of devices using computer technology that will assist people with disabilities to live a fuller life. The problem with technological developments is that they are expensive at first because of development costs and the fact that they are not being mass-produced. Over time, the cost of technology usually drops if a device is placed into mass production. The problem faced by the devices described above is that they are not covered by insurance and, because of this, are unaffordable to the general public, and currently not mass-produced.

Now that President Obama finally has a Health and Human Services Secretary in place, one of her priorities should be a comprehensive review of the reim-

bursement policies of Medicare/Medicaid. These policies, which have been evolving over the past 44 years, are sadly out-of-date and do not take into account the rapid developments and improvements to people's lives offered by new devices. They are still in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while technology is now in the 21<sup>st</sup>. Many people are being denied the chance to have a better quality of life. While expensive at first, over time these devices should more than pay for themselves due to the increased productivity of the persons using them.

### Things to do in June

Since June is the beginning of the summer, there are a couple of events that I want to inform Disabled Dealer readers about.

The first one is the Tenth Annual Richard West 5-Mile Wheelchair Race, which takes place on Long Beach Island, New Jersey, on Saturday, June 20. The race starts at 9:00 AM in Harvey Cedars and ends in Barnegat Light. There are eleven prize categories with over \$5,000 in cash prizes awarded. Over the past 10 years, Richard has developed the race into a major event on the Wheelblazers Grand Prix Tour. The race is designed to be inclusive. You can walk, roll, hand-cycle and race the five-mile course. One does not have to be a professional athlete to enjoy participating in the event. After the race, there is an awards ceremony complete with trophies, and a free lunch is provided. For more information about the race, email Richard at [rwest72@comcast.net](mailto:rwest72@comcast.net) or call him at 609-296-1043.

A week later, on Saturday June 27, Very Special Arts of New Jersey (VSA/NJ) will be holding the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary performance of the Unlimited Potential Theater Company at the George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The performance will consist of a theater piece called "Adagio," about people's personal experiences with disability, a presentation of an episode of "The Shadow" from the Golden Age of Radio, and the poetry of Emily Dickinson and others. The artistic director for the event is Leslie Fanelli of Theater in Motion. Tickets are \$6 for adults and \$5 for children and can be purchased from VSA arts of New Jersey. For more information, please contact VSA/NJ at 732-745-3885 (TTY: 732-745-3913), or email them at [info@vsanj.org](mailto:info@vsanj.org).