Multi-Tasking TRAM Plays Many Roles

Seating & mobility professionals are accustomed to technology limitations imposed by funding sources, but there are other limitations, too — some imposed by consumers and families themselves.

Costs add up if families pay for devices out of pocket. Even if cost isn't a concern, how many devices can fit into an average living room?

That might explain manufacturers' current drive to produce — and seating & mobility professionals' interest in — devices that can answer multiple needs in a single package. Case in point: Rifton's TRAM.

Is It a Lift? Is It a Gait Trainer?

On first glance, the TRAM — short for "Transfer & Mobility device" — looks like a patient lift. That's how we first saw it being demonstrated at the Los Angeles Abilities Expo in early 2012.

But as time has gone on, TRAM's other capabilities have gotten more attention — such as in a July *Today Show* segment of a father with ALS using a TRAM to walk with his daughter at her outdoor (!) wedding.

In fact, asked their original goals in creating the TRAM, Rifton's engineering team said, "The development and design grew out of a need for a larger gait trainer to complete our Pacer line and enable the client to achieve a sit-to-stand transfer for supported ambulation, which the largest-size Pacer did not allow." They added that customers wanted "a compact, multi-function device which could be used in an institutional or home setting."

TRAM doesn't skimp on other functions. Options include a built-in scale, and a new low-base version slides under beds to get closer to the consumer being transferred.

One Device, Many Consumers

Margaret Arnold, PT, CEES, CSPHP, has worked with the TRAM.

"There are many categories of patients who will benefit from lift/transfer technology," she said. "Patients with progressive neurological diseases such as multiple sclerosis, ALS and Parkinson's Disease, which slows patients' ability to move and balance. Patients who have had a stroke, brain injury or spinal cord injury, who are unable to walk and move around the house on their own, and very frail and reconditioned patients, whose health is failing and who are just too weak to walk and move around. Other patients are those who have been in intensive care and have what is now called Post Intensive Care Syndrome; this leaves them severely weak. Really, any patient whose mobility is impaired and who cannot transfer themselves and move around the home on their own will benefit."

What she likes about the TRAM: "Whether the customer needs help to transfer from a chair to a bed (sit-sit) transfer, or to get out of a car into a wheelchair, or can bear weight on their legs and can manage a sitting-to-standing transfer from one surface to another, the TRAM can assist. For assisting with walking, the TRAM is extremely effective, taking as much or as little weight from the patient's legs as necessary, and allowing them to be upright and perform day-to-day activities that they would not be able to do sitting or lying down. For example, the recent story of a man with Lou Gehrig's Disease who was very weak, but against all odds, was able to walk his daughter down the aisle on her wedding day."

From the Consumer's Perspective

In June 2013, Patrick Freeman, now 24, was crossing the street when he was struck by a car that ran a red light. The severe brain injury caused spastic quadriplegia that requires full-time care.

His parents, Mike and Cheri, said of their assistive technology search, "We wanted something with more openness, since Patrick does not like devices that seem to surround him. We especially liked the TRAM since it serves multiple purposes. It gives Patrick a clear view all around him and allows us to see how much weight he is bearing so we can slowly give him more weight to bear while keeping him safe at all times."

His parents use the TRAM for transfers, with Mike noting that lift-and-pivot transfers are quicker, "but harder on my back." Taking time to get Patrick into the TRAM takes time, "but it then takes no back effort, and I can weigh him during the transfer."

Is TRAM primarily a patient lift? A transfer device? A gait trainer? In the end, that matters less than the sum of TRAM's abilities.

"Using the TRAM, Patrick has taken his first steps since his accident," Mike said. "We are more than thrilled with the device." ●

— Laurie Watanabe