How Assistive Technology Can Extend Employment Opportunities for Individuals with ALS?

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Who am I?

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- B.S. Communication & Science Disorders
  Abilene Christian University
- Assistive Technology Certification -Brandman University
What is ALS?

- ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. ([http://www.alsa.org/about-als/what-is-als.html](http://www.alsa.org/about-als/what-is-als.html))

- Types of ALS
  - Sporadic - the disease seems to occur at random with no clearly associated risk factors and no family history of the disease.
  - Familial Genetic ALS - an individual inherits the disease from his or her parents.
What is Assistive Technology?

- Assistive technology (AT) is any item, piece of equipment, software program, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities.
Barriers to Employment

- Physical/Environmental barriers
- Technological barriers
- Attitude barriers
- Policy and funding barriers
- Financial barriers
- Information and service barriers
- Barriers related to psychosocial adjustment of people with ALS
Supports to Employment

- Government Policies
- Information and service delivery supports
- Employer supports
- Technological supports
- Personal support networks (family, friends, etc.)
Does an individual with ALS have rights in their workplace?

YES!

- Americans with Disabilities Act
- Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits private employers, State and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment.
Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act

- Adjustments to the job application process so a qualified applicant with a disability can be considered for a position;
- Modifications to the physical work environment, or to the way a job is usually performed, so an individual with a disability can perform the essential functions of that position; and
- Changes that enable an employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment like those that are enjoyed by other employees without disabilities. This may include access to cafeterias, lounges, auditoriums and company-provided transportation.
Employment & ALS

Rights of Employee

- Reasonable Accommodation
  - Adjustment or modification
  - Interactive process
- Confidentiality
  - Medical records private
  - Accommodation request private

Rights of Employer

- Undue Hardship
  - Significant difficulty
  - Significant expense
Questions to Consider:

1. What limitations is the employee experiencing?
2. How do these limitations affect the employee and the employee’s job performance?
3. What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of these limitations?
4. What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems? Are all possible resources being used to determine possible accommodations?
5. Has the employee been consulted regarding possible accommodations?
6. Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the employee to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations and to determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
7. Do supervisory personnel and employees need training?
Stage’s of ALS

**Early Stage**

- Signs of the early stages of ALS:
  - Muscle Weakness
  - Tightness
  - Cramping and/or twitching
  - Symptoms usually start in arms or legs

- Pseudobulbar palsy (middle stage ALS symptom)

**Middle Stage**

- Signs of the Middle Stages of ALS
  - Muscle Weakness spreads throughout the body
  - Some muscles become paralyzed
  - Possible difficulty with speaking, swallowing, and breathing

**Late Stage**

- Signs of the Late Stages of ALS:
  - Progression towards paralysis of all voluntary muscles
  - Increased difficulty with feeding
  - Respiratory failure
AT Case Study for Employment in Early Stage of ALS

- Dan is 50 year old man recently diagnosed with ALS
- Symptoms: Muscle weakness in neck & arms
- Environment: Office Setting as Customer Service Representative
- Problem:
  - Not getting work done on time
  - Current workstation exacerbating ALS symptoms
  - Falling due to workstation setup
- Possible Recommendations:
  - Ergonomic Chair (high back, neck rest and arm rest)
  - Height adjustable desk
  - Keyboard rest
  - Height adjustable keyboard tray
  - Safety Assessment (removal of items)
  - Grab bars
AT Case Study for Employment in Early Stage of ALS

- Ergonomic Chair
- Height Adjustable Desk
- Height Adjustable Keyboard Tray
- Pole Grab Bar
- Take a Break Reminder Chrome App
Vocational Rehabilitation ALS Case Study
Additional AT & Vocational Accommodations for Individuals w/ ALS

- **Decreased Stamina/Fatigue**
  - Flexible Schedule
  - Job Restructuring
  - Periodic Rest Breaks
  - Scooters
  - Wearable Anti-fatigue Matting

- **Body weakness/Limited Strength**
  - Compact Material Handling
  - Ergonomic and Adjustable Office Chairs
  - Forearm Supports
  - Multi-Purpose Carts
  - Stair Lifts
  - Stand-lean Stools

- **Spasm/Tic/Tremor/Blinking**
  - On-Screen Keyboards
  - One-Handed Keyboards
  - Speech Recognition Software
  - Money Handling Products

- **Stress**
  - Environmental Sound Machines / Tinnitus Maskers / White Noise Machines
  - Flexible Schedule
  - Apps for Anxiety and Stress
  - Support Animal
Who Can Help?/Where to Start?

1. DES Vocational Rehabilitation
2. ARIZONA @ WORK
3. DES Employment Services
4. Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program
5. Work Incentives Planning and Assistance

Collaborative Technology Solutions LLC.

- Assistive Technology Specialist Provider
  - Vocational Rehabilitation Department
Questions?
Thank you!