



# PM&R ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

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## ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY... Spreading the Word

### Special points of interest:

- AT Program Hosting Regional AT Deep Dive Workshop Feb. 22-24, 2012
- AT Education Series—coming up Spring 2012

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### ...Melissa Oliver, MS, OTR/L, CBIT

One of the missions of the AT Program is to be the expert resource to support the application of assistive technology within the VA health care system. The McGuire AT Team found various ways to implement that mission this past Fall.

of AT evaluations to determine the individuals' needs, about the devices themselves, how veterans

outpatients services.

In October, the AT Program hosted an **Assistive Technology Open House** that was also open to the hospital. We had a fantastic turnout of staff and veterans. They were able to try different devices, ask the AT team questions and hear from Veterans about their experience in the AT Program and its



### ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION LUNCH SERIES

- Staff Join the AT Team to learn about various areas of Assistive Technology and how it can benefit your veteran!
- Every Tuesday starting September 13, 2011 in 2K-115



and/or active duty members qualifies for AT devices, training required and answered any questions they had.

In September, the AT Program participated in the Nursing Skills Day. Nursing had the opportunity to learn about the AT Program as well as try out the various AT devices they may see our veterans using during their daily routine both in inpatients and in



impact on their lives.

The AT Program has been **spreading the word** about Assistive Technology through presentations, workshops, and consultations. In addition, the AT Program has been featured in VISN 6's newsletter: *Voices of VISN 6* with an article entitled: *Assistive Technology Helps Overcome Barriers* as well as on Richmond VA Medical Center's FACEBOOK page.



The **AT Education Lunch Series** was a 7 week opportunity for anyone in the hospital to come and learn about the 7 main areas of AT that our program offers services. AT team members presented opportunities for hands on experience with the various devices. We had physician assistants, clinical social workers, psychologists and therapists attended the Lunch Series. They learned about the process



# Adaptive Driving...Brandon Daniels, RKT, DRS

Adaptive driving is defined as using assistive technology to allow a person with a physical and/or cognitive impairment to drive a motor vehicle (Smith 2011). The impairment can be either congenital or acquired from trauma or disease. When first starting out, patients are evaluated by a Driver Rehabilitation Specialist, whom assesses the patient's range of motion, reaction time, vision, coordination, thought processing and sequencing. The assessments are performed prior to behind the wheel testing or making equipment recommendations. Once it is determined that patient has the mental and physical capabilities to drive, the process of behind the wheel training can begin, and

depending on the impairment the patient may only need training with adaptive equipment while others may need retraining in rules of the road along as well as adaptive equipment. However, not all training is intensive and some patient may only need to be taught small compensatory techniques or have small modification made such as adding a wide angle rearview mirror for a patient with limited neck range of motion.

Selecting equipment for adaptive driving can range from simple to complex and this will vary from patient to patient. With complex injuries such as tetraplegia, using high tech driving systems will allow a person with loss of use of his legs and low functional use of his arms to operate a motor vehicle with little or reduced effort. Me-

chanical hand control devices are less complex but still allow a person who has loss of use of his legs to operate a motor vehicle using only his arms. A person without their right leg use or low functional use of their right leg can use a left foot accelerator pedal. Persons in wheelchairs have ingress and egress of vehicles with vehicle modifications such as lowered floors ramps, six-way power and turny seats. Assistive technology allows patients with impairments to live life to the fullest by maximizing their independence in daily living. For more information contact Brandon Daniels at [Brandon.Daniels@va.gov](mailto:Brandon.Daniels@va.gov) or 804-675-5000 ext 3614

## References

Smith S.E. (2011, October 23). What is Adaptive Driving? Retrieved from <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-adaptive-driving-htm>

## Meet McGuire's AT Team... Deanna Baldassari, OT, Powered Mobility Specialist

Deanna Baldassari grew up in Delaware the youngest of three sisters with a history of bad haircuts and hand me down clothes. In time she chose to attend Alvernia College, now Alvernia University, in South East Pennsylvania. Here she studied for a Masters in Occupational Therapy, played Women's Field Hockey and Lacrosse, and served fancy cocktails and entrees at a fine dining restaurant. She took an interest in mental health and in physical disabilities, specifically spinal cord injury.

In the Spring of 2006, Deanna joined the OT Department of the McGuire VAMC in Richmond. Since the start of her time at the Richmond VA, she was intrigued by wheelchairs and loved the opportunity to get down and

dirty turning wrenches working to get clients the best fit in a chair that meets their medical needs and fits their lifestyle. Deanna discovered her hidden passion for wheelchair seating and positioning and has thrived in this area of physical medicine and rehabilitation at the McGuire VAMC ever since. She can usually be found on the floor of the OT Clinic in bright colored scrubs and a huge smile, surrounded by pieces and parts of the latest wheelchair she is piecing together or tearing apart.

Deanna shares in the McGuire VAMC passion for education by participating with the VCU/MCV Occupational Therapy department as a fieldwork educator in the clinic and a guest lecturer in the classroom. In

addition to this, Deanna loves to share her passion for spinal cord injury rehabilitation and wheelchair seating and positioning through professional presentations, committee participation, and staff in-services. She has presented at local, national, and international conferences, with two presentations this year at the 27<sup>th</sup> International Seating Symposium: Revolution Evolution. Deanna currently serves on the Assistive Technology team in the role of Power Mobility and Seating and Positioning and Adaptive Sports.

She is enthusiastic about the opportunity to share her passion with you and her positive attitude is contagious-stop by and see her in action in the PM&R Department!

**Deanna Baldassari**  
Occupational Therapist



# Veteran's Story.... The Journey to Achieving Their Dream.



Mr. Grimes and Mr. Jones' journey to realizing their dream of participating back in their life again was a process that they have finally seen come. While this veteran and active duty member served during different eras, they shared several things in common one of them being their desire to participate in sports.

Mr. Jones served during the Vietnam Era. He has bilateral amputations above the knee where he wears prosthesis for short distances. However, he uses a powered wheelchair for most of his mobility. But one of his goals was to participate in leisure



activities again. Through the AT Program, Mr. Jones was able to get a hand cycle. He states the hand cycle helps him with his upper body strength, losing weight and managing his stress.

***“It’s an enhancement to their life, it’s an enhancement to everything.”*** George Jones

Mr. Grimes served during the OIF/OEF and was injured in Iraq resulting in a TBI. His injuries made running again painful and difficult. But, he was wanting to get back into



Mr. Grimes receiving his trike.

more activities including exercising. Even when walking for periods of time, he stated he ended up paying for it physically the next day. He also was very motivated by his kids and his desire to be involved with them in their activities. The AT Program was able to evaluate and determine that a Trike was the best adaptive sports equipment for him. Now he is able to go 10 miles without issue.

***“It’s just been a major uplift, it’s helped my morale go up by ten fold.”*** Willie Jones



Mr. Jones being fitted for foot plates for his hand





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## Assistive Technology Program Mission

To enhance the ability of Veterans and Active Duty members with disabilities to fulfill life goals through the coordination and provision of appropriate interdisciplinary assistive technology services.

To serve as an expert resource to support the application of assistive technology within the VA health care system.

## Nuts & Bolts of Rehab Engineering Online Sources for AT Product Ideas

...Ben Salatin, MS

Are you ever at a loss when trying to recommend the proper piece of AT for your patient's situation? As a person with a disability, do you ever wonder if there is an AT solution that would make part of your life easier? I'm sure we've all been in these situations at times so I'd like to give you a few helpful websites that have information and reviews on a wide variety of AT.

<http://atwiki.assistivetech.net>

The ATWiki website is maintained by the Center for Assistive Technology and Environmental Access (CATEA) at the Georgia Institute of Technology. The type of information includes short articles, papers, magazine-like columns, demonstrations of AT applications, research briefs and

a glossary. Their library includes over 22,000 descriptions and pictures of currently available AT devices. You can search the library by function, activity, or vendor.

<http://www.abledata.com>

The AbleData website is maintained by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research which is a part of the U.S. Dept of Education. The website includes a product library of almost 40,000 items with detailed descriptions of each product's functions, features, price, and manufacturer contact information. There is also information on non-commercial prototypes, customized and one-of-a-kind products, and do-it-yourself designs.

<http://abilitynet.wetpaint.com>

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