

## Eli's Rehab Report

### Clinical Rehab Roundup: Crank Up Your Assistive Technology Usage in the Schools

Effect of assistive technology in a public school setting. Watson AH, Ito M, Smith RO, Andersen LT. AM. Am J Occup Ther. 2010 Jan-Feb;64(1):18-29.

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) requires therapists in the schools to consider assistive technology when planning special education students' individualized education programs (IEPs). IDEA also requires therapists to use the assistive technology based on peer-reviewed literature -- even though the research on assistive technology's effectiveness in the public schools is scant.

The good news: Researchers just published a study conducted at Arlington Public Schools (Virginia) in the January/February 2010 issue of the American Journal of Occupational Therapy that explored assistive technology's effect in a public school education setting. And the study measure researchers used may be the key to effectively collecting assistive technology outcomes data.

The findings: Relative to other interventions, assistive technology provided by a multidisciplinary team of occupational therapy practitioners, speech-language pathologists, and educators may have a significant effect on achieving positive outcomes indicated on IEPs for students in special education, announced a press release of the study from the American Occupational Therapy Association.

School-based occupational therapy is designed to enhance the student's ability to fully access and be successful in the learning environment. This may include the use of assistive technology, among other interventions, AOTA said.

"Assistive technology's contribution as an intervention strategy appears to be greater than nine other possible interventions -- such as related services, tutoring, changes to the curriculum and student maturation -- explored in the study," said **Anne H. Watson, PhD, OT/L**, an occupational therapist with Arlington Public Schools.

Researchers used as a study measure the Student Performance Profile (SPP), which the Rehabilitation Research Design and Disability Center developed originally for the Ohio Assistive Technology Infusion Project. This study used a modified, print version of the instrument written in conjunction with and approved by the original developers, AOTA said.

"The Student Performance Profile appears to have potential as an effective means of collecting assistive technology outcomes data in the public school setting," Watson told AOTA, naming advantages such as ease of administration, scoring, and customization. The instrument is also "sensitive to change in performance over time," Watson said. "An instrument with these characteristics may help special education staff pursue data collection regarding the effect of assistive technology on student performance."