

Policy development: assistive technology in a Danish context



Abstract: *With consideration for the individual and socio-economic perspective of the use of assistive technology, the Danish Association of Occupational Therapists (Ergoterapeutforeningen) has developed and adopted a policy paper with principles and recommendations. Recommendations include the need for increased research, education and training, as well as the establishment of a specialist society to promote documentation, evidence and increased public knowledge of assistive technology. Producing policy papers is important for promotion of occupational therapy services, strategies and research to stakeholders at all levels of society.*

Key words: Assistive technology, policy development.

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Assistive technology is of great political interest these years. The growing interest is focusing on how technology can support people with physical or mental disabilities, in order for them to become more self-reliant and achieve better quality of life. Also the economic aspects due to demographical changes are being debated. It reflects the fact, that assistive technology both has an individual and a socio-economic perspective.

The Danish Association of Occupational Therapists has approximately 7,000 active members and 1,000 student members. It corresponds to approx. one occupational therapist per 1,000 inhabitants. The Association considers assistive technology important occupational positions, and an increasing number of occupational therapists are working in the field. Two thirds of occupational therapists work with assistive technology in Denmark.

Recently the board of the Association adopted a policy paper with a set of principles and recommendations regarding assistive technology (see www.etf.org). The Association recommends local and regional governments to support high quality assistive technology solutions and to formulate strategies for both research in and implementation of technologies.

Furthermore, the Association is advocating that local and regional authorities recruit more occupational therapists to collect and develop valuable knowledge concerning quality standards and research activities.

The Association will therefore seek to ensure that all occupational therapist receive adequate training and education and are given working conditions, which allow them to maintain and gain new insights in the area of assistive technology.

Another key initiative is establishment of a specialist society under the auspices of the Association for members

working with assistive technology. The purpose of the society for assistive technology is to promote documentation and evidence-based research. The specialist society also acts as professional spokespersons. Finally, the ambition is to increase public knowledge of assistive technology in general.

The Association administers a Facebook group with more than 300 members, who often share information and experiences concerning assistive technology. Furthermore, the magazine frequently publishes special themes about gadgets, including presentations and reviews of new technologies.

Every other year the Association takes part in a large Danish Health and Rehab conference, where representatives meet participants and inform them about concerns of assistive technology. In 2011 a special session was held to students to enhance their interest in the field. The next Health and Rehab conference will be held in September 2014 in Copenhagen.

There is a need to actively promote occupational therapy services, strategies and research to stakeholders at all levels of society. This role is undertaken by the Association through various means including policy papers, standard setting, specialist societies, social media, and conferences.

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