TRANSITION AND RELATED SERVICES

Submitted by Debbie Eisenberg PT, DPT, MS, LEBA Clinical Director

We have all experienced interactions with some “district” therapists who have voiced their “district” philosophy that therapy is decreased or discharged for high school students. As advocates for our students and for all students, I hope we all try to express our alternative concept, that therapy during the transition period of a student’s life span can support and facilitate greater independence in self- care, ambulation, needed vocational skills, and functional mobility. It should be universally accepted that developmentally disabled students need additional help to achieve post- graduation community social and recreational relationships, and their best level of functional independence during this period. As a reminder, IDEA stipulates that the initial review for transition planning by the treatment team begin at the student’s age 16.

A recent study in Physical Therapy, Journal of the American Physical Therapy Association, Vol 98, No. 9, September 2018, Utilization of Physical Therapy Services During Transition for Young People With Cerebral Palsy” A Call for Improved Care Into Adulthood, notes that access to and use of rehabilitation and mobility technology significantly contributed to positive employment outcomes for individuals with CP. In addition, it is noted that there are demographic and disability characteristics that do affect the physical therapy services received by transition aged people with CP.

I am confident that we provide interventions that assist all our students using advances in technology, but it may be that maybe we can do a bit more. Do we consider power mobility wheelchairs for all students who would benefit from that increased functional mobility? Do we consider all ADL assistive devices for students who require assistance of others to complete their dressing and eating activities? Do we consider all computer access technology devices for students who may benefit from them? Do we consider all types of vocational opportunities for our students when we discuss transition at our IEP meetings for 16 year olds? Keep in mind, that we can consider transition in our goals for students before their 16th birthday, as well.

We are truly experts in treating students with exceptional levels of disability and we are also fortunate that we practice in supportive schools that provide equal levels of therapy for our students, that don’t take into account their demographics. So the challenge to all of us is to advocate for our students in advance of their graduation/transition in our schools, and to advocate for all students in secondary schools, when we have the opportunity to engage with those therapists who have the ethical and clinical responsibility to do more.

Let me know how I can help with this challenge. Feel free to contact me any time and certainly when I visit your site on any given Thursday! Thanks always for your dedicated service to our students in all our sites!