**Wheelchairs and Scooters**

**Guest speaker from Western Rehab Solutions, Martinez, Calif.**

*No matter whether you use manual or power w/c:*

* Insurance will cover only if it is a medical necessity. Even then, look at your specific benefits, co-pays, and deductibles. This comes under the category of Durable Medical Equipment (DME).
* Insurance doesn’t pay for vehicle lifts or modifications to carry w/c aboard.
* Prior to purchase, there should be a home assessment to review
  + - Need for ramp(s) having safe incline
    - Doorway widths, hallway widths, cornering needs, and furniture placement
    - Carpet vs. solid surface flooring
    - Needs for transfer to toilet, bedside commode, shower chair, other seating

*Manual Wheelchairs*

* Don’t cut yourself short on features
* Who’s going to be lifting the w/c? You as the driver of a modified vehicle? Then you’ll have to get it into the area behind driver’s seat. Will there always be a helper to put it in car or trunk?
* Is a helper going to be pushing the chair? Handle height and weight matter.
* Look at folding chairs vs. rigid frame. Folding frame is seen in rental chairs. Rigid frame used for paraplegia.
* Positioning your body is important. Don’t promote bad posture.
* Sling seat is OK for a very active person. Rigid seat and back better when person doesn’t wiggle much.
* Seat cushion vital for comfort and pelvic alignment.

Power Wheelchairs

* Cost from $4,000 - $10,000
* These have a center-wheel drive and tight turning radius. Good inside a home.
* If more positioning is needed, you can get power tilt for pressure relief and power recline for respiratory ease
* New users have a learning curve. Speed should be limited until the person has mastered skills.
* Even if battery dies, chair should have a system override that permits chair to be pushed to safety.
* Can be wider than manual chairs, so watch out that some rooms in your home may become inaccessible.

Scooter vs. Power Wheelchair?

* Scooter not for sweeping, cooking, or most outdoor activities.
* Scooter has a larger tuning radius. Not good in small spaces, esp most bathrooms.
* You need 2 hands to steer and stop a scooter. Leaves you nothing available for carrying a cup of tea, plate, book, etc. Power w/c is usually operated by one hand using a joy stick. That leaves the other hand free.

**MY MOST IMPORTANT LESSON FROM THIS PRESENTER**: FALLING IS LIFE ALTERING. Get the w/c (regular or power) and use it for little bits of time when you feel most tired or vulnerable to a fall. Be the one to make a choice to use it. Don’t fall and smash your head or break a bone. Don’t end up in a rehab facility hearing that you can’t go home until you have a w/c and have accomplished a bunch of living space accommodations necessitated by your wheels.

**Sal from Home Improvements for the Handicapped spoke about purchasing mobility scooters.**

* Cost can range from $200 to $5,000 and even up to $10,000. The most expensive ones go over rough terrain, have 4-wheel drive, include seat belts, hold heavier people.
* Bigger scooter for bigger person.
* Sal’s favorite brands come from Hong Kong, China and Israel.
* Maintenance requirements: Every 2-3 years battery and tires need replacing. Otherwise, everything is sealed.
* Lifetime: Usually 6-7 years.
* Why a 3-wheeled scooter? Using it around people, in tight places, inside the house. Very good at negotiating in tight spaces.
* Why a 4-wheeled scooter? Greater stability, use it outdoors, travel greater distances, user may present a history of falling.
* Why a scooter vs. a power wheelchair? Scooter is easier to transport. Scooters are for people who can still stand and take a step or so.
* Power wheelchairs are for people who can’t walk. Typically see 18-inch turning radius and joy stick for control. Need special lift to transport.
* Do all scooters go into all cars? No. There are compatibility calculators that reputable dealers will use to determine what fits with your vehicle.
* How to get a scooter into a car? A lift is easiest system, especially if you’re alone and unstable on your feet. Alternatively, some scooters can be disassembled and put into the trunk of a car. This requires upper body strength and general agility, because you’ll be doing this every time you travel by car. See earlier info about compatibility calculations.
* Prevention of pressure sores is important. Use special cushion(s) when you’re sitting in one position for multiple hours. Very easy to forget to wiggle and rebalance your weight. You’ll also appreciate good cushioning when you take a scooter out on the road for neighborhood travel. Lots of bumps and stones you’ve never noticed before can make for a rough ride.
* How to pay for a scooter? He usually requires cash, then the user requests reimbursement from insurance or Medicare. Insurance and Medicare have their own conditions for reimbursement. Don’t assume you’ll get reimbursed.
* How to find a reputable dealer? Check out 2 websites: PrideMobility.com and Harmar.com You’ll see a locator tool that organizes representatives by zip code.
* How can we reach Sal with questions? Telephone 510-786-1072, after 9 a.m. Pacific Time.

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