President's message

Tempering technology with care

We truly live in amazing times. Every year – seemingly every day – we witness new, exciting technological advances, many of which have tremendous usefulness for persons with spinal cord injury (SCI).

Just think about it: innovations in telephone, Smartphone, and Bluetooth® technology facilitate communication. Improved wheelchair features and switches not only allow for better control, but offer a more cosmetic design. In rehabilitation centers across the world, a number of new robotic exoskeletons are being studied to allow people with SCI to regain upright posture and, potentially, community ambulation. Patients are being placed on robotic trainers for locomotion and brain-computer interface technology is opening new avenues of treatment. Implanted electrical stimulation devices offer a variety of applications in both the research realm and already approved clinical protocols. For example, there are devices that enhance upper or lower extremity movement and functional activity, improve bowel and bladder function, and regulate respiratory function. In addition, most clinicians are now documenting patient status and even writing prescriptions on their computers or tablets.

Technology is a gift, one that all of us, especially our patients, are increasingly dependent upon. However, it is

critical that as SCI professionals, we do not forget the importance of the human touch and interaction in patient care. We need to be aware that our reliance on technology does not replace the contact and communication that we have with the patient and family.

Shorter stays for rehabilitation post injury are becoming the norm. Patients are going home earlier, despite the fact that they may not have yet mastered such essentials of daily living as their bowel program. While they may be able to access information on their Smartphone, no electronic device can effectively teach them or their families how to properly recognize and treat autonomic dysreflexia. And we are forever mindful that technology cannot hold hands with a patient or family members to help them through a difficult transition.

Of course, we all love technology and admittedly can no longer live without it. But let us make sure that technology adds to the patient experience and does not detract from the human interaction that remains a critical aspect of our work as rehabilitation professionals.

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