



Communication Aid  
Manufacturers  
Association

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October 23, 1999

Lewis Golinker, Esq.  
Director  
Assistive Technology Law Center  
Suite 507  
202 East State Street  
Ithaca, New York 14850

Dear Lewis:

I write in response to your request for information regarding the second and third elements of the Medicare durable medical equipment definition, i.e., to explain the "medical purposes" served by AAC devices, and whether they are useful to a person in the absence of illness or injury.

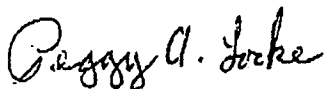
The medical purposes served by the AAC devices and related products manufactured and distributed by CAMA member companies offer treatment to persons with severe expressive communication disabilities. The people who use and benefit from AAC devices have historically been those whose communication disabilities are so severe that improved expressive communication was believed to be impossible. But with AAC devices, they are able to get their needs met, live successfully in the community, lead active lifestyles, and be employed.

AAC devices allow their users to achieve these goals by providing a functional substitute for body organs and structures that are necessary for the production of speech but which are non-functioning or mal-functioning due to illness, injury, disease or condition. Another way to describe the purpose of AAC devices is as a functional by-pass of these non- or mal-functioning body structures, i.e., they allow the AAC device user to express a thought (message) as speech, by by-passing the nerves, muscles, and organs of speech which, due to impairment, make natural speech ineffective. The AAC device is the by-pass. Viewed in this way, AAC devices provide the same benefits and serve the same functional purposes as power wheelchairs. A person with quadriplegia or other severe mobility impairment is unable to implement the desire to move from place to place. With a power wheelchair, however, the person is able to by-pass his or her non-working spinal column or other non- or malfunctioning body structures to accomplish the goal of mobility.

Stated more simply, every aspect of AAC device design, manufacture, marketing and sales is directed exclusively to people with severe communication disabilities. Knowledge of the unmet needs of people with disabilities drives the AAC device design process so that new devices and related products can meet those needs. AAC device marketing is directed exclusively to people with severe communication disabilities. And, the augmentative communication devices and related products manufactured and distributed by CAMA members have been and continue to be sold exclusively for use by persons with severe speech and language disabilities.

Please contact me if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,



Peggy A. Locke.  
President