GETTING IT RIGHT - MATCHING CONSUMER NEED TO SEATING PRODUCT FEATURES

STEPHANIE TANGUAY OTR, ATP
Motion Concepts

Support surface selection may seem overwhelming when the vast array of seat and back products are considered. At the same time, there can be a tendency to narrow the options to the few most familiar products. This creates a tendency for “over-prescription”; providing seating products which exceed the consumers’ needs. Accurately identifying the positioning and support needs of each consumer and matching those specific needs with seat and back support features can reduce the risk of over-prescription and improve the results of the seating components.

Seat surface selection is determined by the consumers’ need for neutral pelvic support, basic comfort and pressure distribution. The highest tier of consumer needs require greater pressure relief, more aggressive positioning or perhaps both. Seat surface contour improves weight distribution. Greater seat contour can increase the alignment and stability at the pelvis. For sensate consumers, comfort is a frequent goal for the seating system. Pressure relief is not necessarily synonymous with comfort, but that presumption can lead to over-prescription of the highest tier pressure relief cushions when a moderate pressure distribution product would be sufficient.

It is virtually impossible for humans to sit for extended periods of time without a minimal amount of posterior support. The amount of support should be determined during the mat evaluation. Can the consumer sit unsupported? If they can move and reach dynamically without losing their balance and return to a neutral sitting position, a back which provides low posterior contact should be adequate for that consumer. For consumers who display limited posterior balance, taller posterior supports are required. Lateral instability indicates the need for lateral contact. Generally, the more limited the lateral trunk balance, the deeper lateral contact is required.

Postural position and stability is assessed to determine the amount of support necessary to achieve balance and maximize functional movement. Matching consumer posture, shape and balance to product characteristics can streamline this process and reduce “over-prescription”. Case studies will illustrate consumer assessment and matching product feature criteria. Determining the optimal balance and stability required for individual consumers can greatly enhance their functional performance. Getting it wrong can limit function and create postural deficits.

As consumers strive for independence, their posture and stability influences their performances of functional activities. Everything from self feeding to propulsion and transfers can be affected; enhanced or impeded. During the evaluation process, the clinicians must consider what the client can do and what the client needs. Can they move into a position of function and return to a neutral or resting position independently? Perhaps the set up of the equipment and the type of seat and back surface can improve the client’s functional performance of specific tasks.

Stability is the key. Poor stability restricts function and can lead to some postural compensation with negative results. The relationship between posture, support, pressure and function must be considered in the equipment selection process. Many of these factors are interrelated, often influencing each other.

References
