

More than Mobility

Mobility and seating manufacturers target the financial needs of facilities, the clinical needs of residents and the risk management needs of staff.

BY ANDRIA SEGEDY



An elderly nursing home resident begins to fidget in his wheelchair. He becomes increasingly agitated. It appears he may need to be restrained or sedated. But a few minutes later, he is calmly rocking

— without the need for restraints or medication.

This is the type of application that facilities are increasingly demanding from their equipment. Wheelchairs and seating products, in particular, must now

perform more than one function and fill staff and facility needs that are often different from their original purpose.

The physical needs of patients, the capabilities of the unskilled staff who are in-house caregivers, and the economic

concerns of purchasing and inventory management departments are all affecting purchasing decisions — and manufacturers have responded with an array of features to meet those needs.

The soothing motion of the Rx Rocker 2001 wheelchair from Crown Therapeutics, Belleville, Ill., is but one example. New wheelchair products specifically for use in the long-term care market are more durable in build and versatile in their capabilities. Meanwhile, these same products are also being built with the work force as well as the patient in mind, manufacturers agree.

In long-term care, the Prospective Payment System gives a facility the incentive to find products that improve the health and conditions of patients, according to Tom Borcharding, vice president of sales for Crown Therapeutics.

Known for its air cushions and mattresses, Crown last year entered the wheelchair market with the Rx Rocker 2001. The chair is made by Rx Rocker Corp., Newbury Park, Calif., but Crown has exclusive distribution of the chair in the United States.

Soothing motion

The Rx Rocker is a benefit to agitated patients in the long-term care market, Borcharding says. “There are groups of patients who are hard for the staff and caregivers to control, such as those with brain injury or Alzheimer’s disease. They are always uncomfortable. It’s a frustrating group for the staff to sedate. Clinicians don’t know there is a wheelchair-based solution.”

Borcharding points to the results of a 1998 study by the University of Rochester Medical Center and funded by the New York State Department of Health. Twenty-five nursing home residents diagnosed as having dementia, from Alzheimer’s disease or other causes, were studied by nurses from the University of Rochester School of Nursing. Nurses at Kirkhaven, a Rochester nursing home, closely monitored patient behavior for the six weeks residents rocked and compared it to their behavior during six weeks when the rocking mechanisms on the chairs were disabled.

The results: Behaviors like crying or expressions of anxiety, tension and



Top to bottom: The Three-Position recliner by Invacare; the RX 2001 by Rx Rocker; the Breezy 100 by Sunrise Medical.

depression dropped in 11 patients, 10 of whom rocked more than 80 minutes a day, according to the study. Several patients also requested less pain medication during the weeks they rocked. Zealous rockers improved their balance.

The chair is available in folding and rigid versions. The tilt in the rocking chair automatically becomes the center of gravity, Borcharding explains. “The rocking is good exercise as well, and it’s

good for their blood circulation and pulmonary care. It’s a natural exercise through a natural rocking motion.”

Multifunctional design

Manufacturers are creating more modular products requiring fewer models that cover a variety of needs, notes Bob Clarke, product manager, Everest & Jennings, a division of Graham-Field, Earth City, Mo.

The company’s Metro LE has a one-piece side frame with dual rear axle positions and a multiposition fork, along with an over-center crosslink folding mechanism. It also has a sectional, reclining back. Clarke points out that the Metro weighs only 35 pounds, compared with the typical institutional chair that weighs 40 to 45 pounds. It also accepts major wheelchair components that are already in the facility from existing E&J chairs such as the Vista and the Traveler.

Nursing homes need different combinations of chairs, agrees Chuck Currie, product manager, Personal Care Products Division, Sunrise Home Healthcare Group, Chula Vista, Calif.

To meet that need, Sunrise has introduced the Breezy 100, a chair frame that can convert into six different chairs: standard, hemi-height, amputee, hemi-height amputee, recliner and hemi-height recliner. The chair’s left/right components are interchangeable, helping to reduce inventory costs. It accepts components from products made by other manufacturers, according to Currie, and its components can fit the Everest & Jennings Tracer. Footrests can swing under the chair if needed. Nursing home staff can also pop the back off and attach a recline kit, Currie notes.

The company’s standard Hoyer chairs will be phased out because of the introduction of the Breezy 100, Currie adds. Only the Hoyer heavy-duty models that come in 20-, and 24-inch widths and have a weight capacity of 350 pounds will remain available.

New Uses

The trend also is to provide appropriate seating and positioning options for people who have often been neglected in

the past. according to Mike Nordquist, senior product manager for the Jay product line, Sunrise Medical Mobility Division, Longmont, Colo.

Partnering with the Breezy is the J2 Deep Contour cushion. This cushion comes with a solid drop seat option that can lower the seat-to-floor height by 1.5 inches and is compatible with the Breezy 100's adjustability, he adds. If a caregiver puts a cushion on top of a wheelchair's sling seat, the patient is raised up

and cannot propel the chair by foot, he explains. The Deep Contour is placed on the chair after the sling has been removed, he adds.

Joe Wentzlof, director of marketing for continuing care products for Elyria, Ohio-based Invacare Corp., says, "We're looking at every aspect of patient handling to develop products that will assist caregivers in their day-to-day tasks."

With PPS paying a fixed amount per resident and with increased pressures

placed upon facilities to reduce all expenditures, he says, facilities are analyzing all costs, including those associated with workers' compensation, specifically back injuries caused by the transferring of residents.

Because of these pressures, risk management has become more of a focus in the long-term arena, he notes.


Adding to its products that help lower injury-related costs, Invacare is also offering a three-position recliner with padded arm rests and upholstered side panels to help prevent skin tears, says Wentzlof.

The Continuing Care Group chairs also offer seating products with tilt and recline mechanisms allowing caregivers to adjust the chair for an individual resident's comfort, he says. A secondary benefit of the tilt feature is the dispersion of the weight, reducing the risks of decubitus ulcers, he adds.

"You can't talk about mobility without discussing seating," notes Michael Devlin, marketing director of custom manual mobility products, Invacare Corp. "It's important that unskilled staff can accomplish fairly sophisticated seating, positioning and mobility goals. We're engineering products that make achieving these goals possible."

The Action Solo adult tilt-in-space chair from Invacare has an indicator scale on a sliding track that shows the staff person how much the frame is being tilted, explains Devlin.

In addition, the Infinity, a new seat cushion introduced in March gives staff the option to move a single center portion of the cushion to fit the individual needs of residents. The movable foam piece includes a pocket of gel. While providing seating adjustments, fewer cushion pieces help to eliminate misplaced sections, Devlin stresses. The cushion is enclosed in a protective waterproof case, all within a washable cover.

Wentzlof adds that trends in seating include the use of positioning accessories such as bolsters, upgraded seat cushions and features such as drop arms. "These accessories," he says, "all help to better the clinical outcome and provide resident comfort." 

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