

# DIRECTIONS

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## REHAB CASE STUDY

### Telehealth: A Tool for Reassessing Upper Extremity Mobility Devices

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Over the past five years, telehealth therapy appointments have grown from an option rarely used to an important tool in patient care. In the following case study, telehealth was a major factor in the funding

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## CLINICAL PERSPECTIVE - CEU ARTICLE

### Considerations for Optimal Outcomes in the Provision of CRT Using Telehealth



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Though the COVID-19 pandemic closed many doors for therapists to evaluate clients for CRT, it opened the door for therapists to remotely participate in these evaluations. Though telemedicine has been studied and performed for nearly six decades, there are still no standards of care. Best practice considerations are proposed for the client, their environment, the rehab technology supplier, and the therapist.

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## Telehealth: A Tool for Reassessing Upper Extremity Mobility Devices

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of a Jaco robotic arm upper extremity mobility device.

Annah is a 28-year-old mother of two (ages 4 and 2) who suffers from Spinal muscular atrophy Type 1. During the time of her initial evaluation, Annah required 24-hour care due to her limits in mobility. Annah currently lives in an apartment with ramp access. The apartment is not set up for her regarding accessibility, therefore full assistance continues to be an important need for her safety and general daily living tasks.

Annah came to our Aaron W. Perlman Center at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center outpatient clinic with a single goal in mind: to receive a Jaco robotic arm. The Jaco arm is an upper extremity mobility device manufactured by Kinova. It is considered durable medical equipment and is funded

for individuals with upper extremity deficits. Annah had seen one of these robotic arms and immediately knew it was the answer to her prayers.

"I know the Jaco robotic arm was made for me," she said during our initial evaluation session.

I recall thinking how great it would be if it were that easy. Upper extremity mobility evaluations typically involve two 90-minute sessions to evaluate all the options and make an educated decision on which device works best for the client. It usually takes the bulk of two sessions to sort through the mechanical, power and robotic devices available for clients. One advantage to having minimal movement in her arms was that Annah's only device option was the Jaco robotic arm.

The Jaco robotic arm is an upper extremity mobility device that

mimics natural arm motion. The arm plugs directly into a client's power chair; therefore, to control the device, Annah would need to show skilled use of the joystick of her power wheelchair. Since Annah had already mastered accessing her power wheelchair joystick, she was an excellent candidate for this device.

During device trials at our clinic, Annah used the Jaco effortlessly to retrieve objects and perform activities of daily living tasks such as combing hair, picking up cups of water and opening doors. In fact, I have never seen anyone use the device as well as Annah did during her first session. She made the Jaco arm appear like an extension of her body.

After the initial evaluation, I agreed that the Jaco robotic arm was made for Annah and would dramatically improve her quality of life. After completing my evaluation paperwork, a letter of medical necessity was sent to the

vendor who started the process of requesting funding.

There were many complications throughout this part of the process, including vendor change, Annah's loss of coverage, insurance changes, vendor extensions needed for recoding of the device, new paperwork for resubmission, another insurance change, etc. Due to these complications, an updated evaluation was necessary to resubmit for funding. This is where telehealth became a vital part of the reevaluation process for Annah's equipment.

For the robotic arm to be funded, an updated evaluation of Annah's current function was necessary; however, Annah's health was not stable enough to travel the four hours needed for a face-to-face interaction at our outpatient clinic.

Luckily, I had run into similar situations before. During the pandemic, I completed an initial assessment for a robotic arm.

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In this case, telehealth was used for the evaluation with a follow-up “in-person” session at our clinic conducted later. In Annah’s case, this order would be reversed. The main issue here was my documentation had to clearly show Annah was still able to use the Jaco device. Since we were meeting via telehealth, the justification would take some thought. Prior to the telehealth appointment, I ran through the evaluation and how I could clearly assess that the robotic arm was still an option for her.

Reassessing her upper extremity function would be a simple observation of her active movements through the computer screen. However, since Annah did not have a Jaco on hand for the evaluation, assessing her current ability to use the device was not an option.

After thinking this over, I felt the best way to reassess her ability to use the arm was to show her current joystick access. As mentioned previ-

ously, Annah is a power chair user and maintains a skilled ability to maneuver her wheelchair using a standard joystick.

During our telehealth reevaluation appointment, updated everything on the LMN, including any changes in medical condition. This part of the evaluation was all done through patient interview and chart review. The main change was a respiratory infection, which had been the cause for the telehealth visit. My interview and documentation showed that Annah’s medical issues had not regressed and her condition was stable.

Next, there was the issue of demonstrating current upper extremity functional status. Annah demonstrated this through active movements that I observed and documented via video. She showed no change in functional status.

Everything above was documented on my LMN, then resubmitted to the vendor with fingers crossed. I resubmitted my updated evaluation

paperwork for rereview on Feb. 29, 2024, and the device was approved on April 18, 2024.

This is an excerpt from the email I received from Annah:

*Hey Bill!*

*I wanted to reach out and let you know I got my Jaco today! I cried happy tears because for the first time in my life I opened a door today. For the first time, I put my own sunglasses on and held a bottle of sweet tea to my mouth.*

*These were the first of the firsts. I know there’s going to be hundreds more. I can’t even describe to you how it feels to be capable.*

*So ... thank you. That’s not enough. But thank you.*

*Annah*

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