Abandonment of Assistive Technology

When Assistive technology (AT) is not appropriate for a person’s environment or it does not meet their needs, they are more likely to stop using it.

What is abandonment?
Abandonment occurs when a person stops using a device. There may be a number of reasons for this. On average, 30% of AT is abandoned within one year of receiving the product.

For the user, abandonment of AT can result in a lost opportunity for improving quality of life, and can lead to frustration and poor psychological outcomes.

For the service provider, there is a loss of resources and increased environmental waste, particularly when abandoned AT is unable to be recovered, reused or recycled.

As the rates of non-communicable disease and disability increase, and global populations age, it is likely that there will be more demand for AT products. Therefore, the issue of abandonment is a significant social and economic issue that needs to be considered by service providers.

What causes abandonment?
Abandonment results from an interaction of four major factors, which include:

1. **Personal factors**: age, gender, acceptance and understanding of diagnosis, changes in health, mental health, changes in personal situation.

2. **Device factors**: poor design or assembly, quality of product, durability, appearance, weight, transport difficulties, function.

3. **Environment factors**: social support, discrimination, physical barriers.

4. **Service delivery factors**: user participation, user training, follow up support, poor prescription, poor fitting, poor adjustment, device causes pain.

What can services do to reduce abandonment?

**Satisfaction with a service is as important as satisfaction with a device in reducing abandonment.**

Strategies that can help to prevent abandonment include:

- **Client-centred approach**: promoting the user’s involvement in all decisions leads to greater satisfaction and fewer issues.
- **Quality service delivery**: having structured approaches to service delivery and ensuring quality support leads to greater use of AT.
- **Follow up**: home visits and follow up help to support changes in the user’s condition and any need for maintenance, user training or device adjustments.
- **Quality products**: talking with suppliers and donors to advocate for appropriate, quality products minimises device issues.
- **Peer support**: connecting people with other users helps them in decision making and with acceptance of their AT.
- **Client education**: Better education allows clients to make informed decisions reducing the likelihood of abandonment.
- **Professional development**: continuing training of personnel will give them the necessary skills for quality service delivery.
- **Advocacy**: integrating AT, accessibility and inclusion into public policies will help overcome social and environmental factors that increase abandonment.