

Keeping up with technology

Technology is a part of our everyday life and the rapid changes that occur are often hard to keep up with. Take for example a cell phone, which now has so many functions that many of us are daunted by just opening the instruction manual. Prosthetics is also benefiting from changes in technology, however at a lesser pace. There are only a few large manufacturers and they put large amounts of money into research and development. The benefits take time to hit the market place and are often as a limited release in set countries to gauge the reaction and ensure reliability. All the major manufacturers produce a large and often complex range of products that as prosthetists we need to keep up to date with. We are very lucky that manufacturers run workshops for us in New Zealand, which helps us to evaluate new products on the market and understand how to use these products correctly. Obviously, we cannot use every product, as an example there are around 200 prosthetic knees on the market. With this in mind we have to evaluate carefully what we will and will not use, taking into consideration function, reliability, availability and cost. To make a mistake with components i.e., choosing an unreliable part can be very costly to the New Zealand taxpayer and we are always very conscious of getting value for money.

Every few years there are major congresses held which gives us an opportunity to see the best the world has to offer and the New Zealand Artificial Limb Board sends a number of its staff to these congresses. Many of the manufacturers use these as a launching platform for new products. Along with the release they run workshops to give more in depth information on the products to help us in making clinical decisions for component choice.

The internet is another tool in our decision-making process, it has given all of us unprecedented access to information. The manufacturers have taken advantage of this to promote products to the clinician and amputee alike. This has meant the clinician has to be very well informed on products to give sound advice if queried by you as the consumer. As mentioned earlier it is not possible to support every product that is on the market and when we decide on appropriate components, we are certainly not looking at the cheapest or the most expensive as we are aware of our budgetary limitations. We are always looking for products that can enhance an amputee's life style and fit into our criteria of function, availability, reliability and cost.

If you come across products on the internet, by all means please discuss this with your prosthetist, he/she is the expert and will give you sound advice based on their knowledge and our criteria.

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