

Las Vegas, NV based company's focus on treating ALS patients leads to innovative solutions.

By Trent McCallson, ATP

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Western Assistive Technology and Western Home Care together focus on treating patients diagnosed with ALS, among other conditions, and work hard to increase services, provide better products and control costs across the board.

For people affected by Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, or ALS, dealing with the physical changes of the disease is only a part of the challenge after diagnosis. ALS, commonly referred to as Lou Gehrig's Disease, is a devastating progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. As the motor neurons die, the brain loses the ability to initiate and control muscle movement. As voluntary muscle movement is progressively affected, patients in the later stages of the disease may become totally paralyzed. Western Home Care and Western Assistive Technology, two southern Nevada based companies who work in partnership to provide services to this challenging clientele, are very familiar with the affects of ALS on the person diagnosed, as well as the strain that it can put on a family and their finances. "This is a truly devastating disease" says Trent McCallson of WATC who has been working with the ALS community abroad since 1993. "From the time of diagnosis, there is an intense scramble to equip a patient with everything that they'll need throughout the course of the disease process." Western specializes in equipping and caring for ALS patients and takes a unique care centered approach to meet their needs. Heath Hairr is a respiratory therapist and is the CEO of Western Home Care. Heath and his company go to great lengths to provide care and education to their patients. Hairr says, "ALS patients deserve and should expect quality, outcome focused care from their healthcare professionals and organizations. Anyone providing care to patients with such needs must work hard and understand the disease process, the rate at which changes can and often do happen and the multidimensional dynamics between the patient and their family, caregivers, clinicians and suppliers."

"Challenges present opportunities," says Trent, "and healthcare presents a lot of challenges." One way Western plans to mitigate costs while maintaining the level of care is to refurbish and reissue the high quality custom powered wheelchairs that are often returned and mothballed after just months of use. "It's just such a waste of money and resources to keep purchasing new equipment when there are perfectly capable and customizable options available. We need to preserve as many resources as we can to sustain viability in the rapidly declining reimbursement structure within the healthcare system." Medicare and some state Medicaid programs have used equipment reimbursement rates for equipment that can reduce their costs anywhere from 35-60% compared to new equipment. That means that Medicare and private insurers can save up to 60%. Patient co-pays can be reduced by up to 60%, and philanthropy monies can have more impact on care through services rather than equipment. "Obviously we cannot use low quality, low cost products. We will use the best and most modular products available throughout our fleet to ensure usability, reliability and availability and customize the accessories needed for a perfect fit and positive outcome."

The ALS population is not the only group who can benefit from such a program. There are many people who use powered wheelchairs for mobility and some who expire soon after receiving their equipment just the same. Their wheelchairs can sometimes be rebuilt, modified and reissued to someone who after evaluation presents as a low impact user, or someone who won't put a lot of structural wear and tear on their equipment. They are perfect candidates for such a program and it can save the healthcare system a tremendous amount of money at the same time.

Both Western Home Care and Western Assistive Technology approach their business with a unique

outcome measured approach that has put care before profit and say that providing better care is the catalyst for success from everyone's standpoint. "More affordable options make services more available to the clients. Using the highest quality products help us all maintain trust between the patient, supplier, manufacturer, and clinician. It makes all the difference to be a solution focused company in the healthcare arena and the payors are thrilled that we can save them a significant amount of money in the process. Everyone's needs are met and that's what healthcare is supposed to be about."

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Western Assistive Technology Consulting is a community resource and medical equipment supplier that specializes in providing outcome solutions through custom medical products and community education.

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