

*Physical Disabilities
Through the Lifespan*



Sensory and Communication Disorders

July 22, 2003



State of the Field

- Consumers are afraid to ask for accommodations in the workplace.
- Sensory loss has a profound impact on one's quality of life, such as the ability to shop, talk on the phone, and socialize.
- Physicians lack the disability competence and sensitivity essential to appropriate interaction.
- Assessments often fail to address sensory loss and problems in communication



State of the Field

- Hearing aids significantly improve speech recognition and decrease hearing disability, yet only 30 percent of elderly people with hearing loss purchase aids.
- Professionals fail to accommodate to the vision- and hearing-impaired.
- Educational materials that would benefit this population are not adequately disseminated.



Problems/Concerns/Issues

- There is a strong reciprocal relationship between depression and sensory loss.
- Technology is not being optimally utilized by people with sensory loss. Eight in 10 people who need hearing aids are not using them.
- Inadequate data exists to shape policy.



Problems/Concerns/Issues

- Environmental accommodations for the hearing- and visually-impaired, such as providing bigger print on pill bottles, are absent or deficient both in the workplace and the community.
- Family and community relationships with the sensory impaired are often based on inappropriate or uninformed expectations.
- Functional information is not being adequately collected.



Research Priorities

- Identify communication barriers to health care delivery.
- Find ways to increase the use of functional tools to improve interventions.
- Identify barriers to rehabilitation utilization among the aging population.
- Identify model programs that are effective and replicable.



Research Priorities

- Determine what percentage of people with sensory impairments are using appropriate technology, what percentage are not, and why?
- Using a cohort (longitudinal?) study, identify the impacts of sensory impairment throughout the lifespan.