

Home accessibility easier with products offering solutions

BY STACIE CARLSON
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Each day, people with disabilities face many challenges, both in and out of the home. Everyday tasks, like bathing or opening doors, can be difficult. New innovations help make living with a disability easier.

“Rehabilitation equipment and technology has really opened up a broad spectrum of choices for people with functional mobility impairments,” said Mark Orlikowski, director of Patient and Client Relations at Bay Home Medical and Rehab located in Traverse City. “Whether people are wheelchair bound, use a walking aid or simply experience generalized weakness, they can find a wide array of products to enable them.”

Those products include much more than grab bars. In fact, there are literally products available for every aspect of home mobility.

“There is a ton of stuff out there,” said Todd Altman, with Customer Service for Airway Oxygen in Traverse City. “The primary goal is to let people live life. They may

have a disability, but that shouldn’t stop them. In fact, our manager is a paraplegic, and he plays tennis, water skis and snowmobiles. There are products out there for everything, and if people have ambition, there are products available and ways to follow their dreams.”

Home-related products include everything from stair lifts, vertical lifts and elevators to residential automatic door openers, portable or permanent ramp systems with or without handrails and power, lightweight manual, or standing wheelchairs.

“Grab bars have been big sellers for years,” added Altman. “We’re also seeing a lot of raised toilet seats and the wheel in/wheel out showers and baths. They’re a lot easier because there isn’t a transfer seat. People just wheel in and transfer right in the shower.”

Probably the biggest market, though, is for wheelchairs that stand people upright. People want smaller, lighter wheelchairs that are more functional,” he said. “Now, many wheelchairs are only 20 pounds. That’s like



Record-Eagle/Jim Bovin

Above, a rollup ramp is demonstrated at Thompson Pharmacy in Traverse City. At right are three common types of ramps: the rollup, suitcase and threshold ramp, respectively.

lifting a few gallons of milk.”

According to Greg Thompson, pharmacist and owner of Thompson Pharmacy and Medical in Traverse City, wheelchairs range in cost from \$300 up to \$25,000 depending on the type and its features.

The trends are toward increased mobility and ease of movement.

“There’s such a huge range of products available,” said Thompson. “One of the innovations, ceiling mounted lifts, actually helps people move from room to room. The lifts allow people to elevate themselves into a sling and from there, they can put themselves into a wheelchair or move along tracks throughout their homes.”

Another innovation and an important factor for those who need accommodations outside of their homes are ramps.

“Some ramps can just be too steep, even at the three-

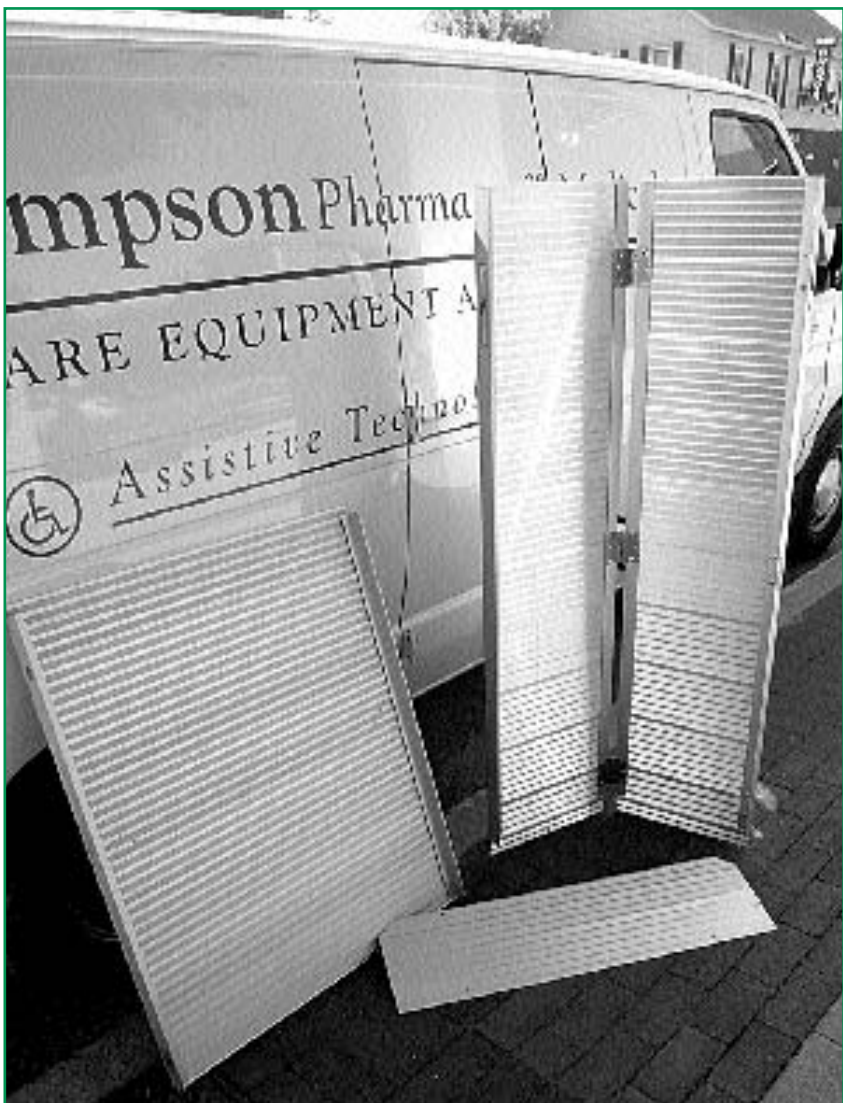
to five- foot level,” added Thompson. “We just recently had a 10 foot ramp that actually arched like a foot bridge with a shallow grade. That made it easier to maneuver.”

Just as important as innovative product availability is to work with a company that’s knowledgeable about a wide range of issues including insurance options, repair needs and correct fitting.

“Just because a physician gives a person a prescription doesn’t mean that the item in question is a covered benefit,” said Orlikowski. “Insurance can be quite confusing and company customer service representatives should have some idea on coverage.”

It can be frustrating for people with disabilities when their physician prescribes something that isn’t covered by insurance.

“It can be a real problem



for people,” added Thompson. “Often, there are people who aren’t medically trained making decisions about what will and will not be covered by insurance.”

Orlikowski also cautions that people should consider whether an equipment company can perform on-site repair, citing that a certified repair staff can make life easier for people living with a disability, as well as their loved ones, if repair becomes an issue.

Also, while many companies offer a lot of different items, they typically specialize in a particular area. It’s important that people consider a company’s specialty prior to working with them.

“An example is fitting a wheelchair,” added

Orlikowski. “It can be a very complicated procedure depending on the needs of the individual. A company that does mostly respiratory and stocks only manual wheelchairs may not be the best option. A little research can go a long way.”

In addition, knowledge of the specific needs of people in relation to their disability is important.

“Some power chairs actually tilt and recline,” said Thompson. “That’s important to help prevent muscle spasms. These features actually allow people to periodically change their position and can help their overall health.”

Stacie Carlson is a local freelance writer.

HOME FACTS

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Lumens: 1,690 1,900

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Total savings over 3 years with the compact fluorescent bulb: \$20.50

*Excludes kWh Integ

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