

Special Articles: Visual Impairments and Sensory Aids

A recent survey of clients reported that the two most urgent problems for individuals with visual impairment relate to mobility and reading. Therefore, we are especially pleased to publish in this issue articles on each of these topics:

- D. W. Hislop, B. L. Zuber, and J. L. Trimble, "Text Scanning Patterns of Blind Optacon and Braille Readers"
- R. L. Hollyfield and T. L. Trimble, "Measuring Gait-Related Blind Mobility Performance."

We have also become interested in some of the recommendations of Jack Ralph¹, a low vision advocate, who has recommended the development of typographical standards for publications to facilitate reading by persons with low vision. In direct response to Mr. Ralph's recommendations, we have increased the type size of this issue of the Journal on a trial basis.

Our review of Ralph's recommendations led us more deeply into a search of the scientific literature on low vision, which confirmed our opinion that the field of low vision is rife with significant research issues. First, we found that Ralph is right—there are no formal typographical standards for publication which would facilitate readability by persons with low vision or even normal vision. Second, we learned of nursing homes which purged from their library holdings all publications printed on glossy stock because experience had shown that their residents had trouble reading such material. On the other hand, we found the question of typographical standards to be an open and complex issue: Should there be standards? If so, what should these contain? For example, on the single issue of type size we discovered that strong arguments can be made against the use of larger type size to assist individuals with low vision. Equipment and training may allow many individuals with low vision who can read large type sizes (16–24 points) to eventually read normal type sizes (10–12 points), thereby obviating the need for large type. In fact, publishing material in normal type size will allow some readers to read and comprehend more. Our point is that there are trade-offs, and the whole issue is wide open for research.

We found compelling evidence that research funding in the area of low vision has not received any emphasis proportionate to the prevalence of this disability. In terms of service, we found that low vision training comprises a significant gap. It is encouraging to note however that increased interest is developing in the areas of visual impairment and low vision nationally as evidenced by these events:

- 1) International meetings on low vision
 - ASILOMAR International Low Vision Conference; Pacific Grove, CA, Feb. 2–6, 1986
 - International Symposium on Low Vision, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, June 25–26, 1986.

¹ RALPH JB A geriatric visual concern: the need for publishing guidelines. *J Am Optomet Assoc*, January 1982a, pp. 43–50.

- 2) Increased emphasis on funding proposals dealing with low vision by the National Eye Institute, (National Institute of Health)
- 3) Publication of the first Journal devoted exclusively to low vision, *The Journal of Vision Rehabilitation*
- 4) Establishment of a Low Vision masters degree program at Pennsylvania College of Optometry
- 5) Publication of one major text, *Understanding Low Vision*, by Randal Jose, and the revision of Eleanor Faye's *Clinical Low Vision*.

We have a strong interest in publishing articles in the area of visual impairments and sensory aids and therefore encourage scientists and engineers to submit papers for publication in the *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development*. We are interested in editorials on state of the art, scientific articles, engineering articles, technical notes, letters to the editor, abstracts and citations of new publications, books and articles and forthcoming events of interest in the field of visual impairments and sensory aids. Publication in the *Journal* offers these advantages: a large international circulation to the Rehabilitation Community, unlimited free reprints, average waiting time between acceptance and publication.

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