

FOREWORD

In a report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education in 1987, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) estimated that 2 million Americans cannot communicate effectively through either gestures, writing, or speech. For these individuals, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems are needed to replace or supplement their existing communication abilities.

The special needs of individuals with severe communication impairments were recognized formally by ASHA in 1981 when it issued an initial Position Statement on Nonspeech Communication. Since that time, the devices, strategies, and techniques used by AAC systems have become much more sophisticated, more flexible, and more widely available. As a result, the freedom of expression guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States has been extended to many of those who are otherwise unable to speak.

Speech-language pathologists have played an important role on the interdisciplinary teams that design and implement individualized AAC systems for persons with severe communication impairments. Moreover, as a result of advances made in AAC systems in recent years, many children and adults who have been imprisoned by severe disabilities have had their lives opened to the enriching experiences that result from education and literacy. The challenges and the rewards involved in these endeavors are enormous. This issue of *Seminars in Speech and Language* shares some of these challenges and rewards and provides an update on current uses of AAC systems to meet the communication and education needs of students in school settings. I feel most fortunate to have been able to convince David R. Beukelman of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln to serve as Guest Editor for this issue. As you read further, I am sure that you will understand why.

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Editor-in-Chief