

# Getting Attention

(Note: The information provided below is of some general value but is mainly intended for residents of British Columbia)

The Assistive Technology and Seating Service is often asked to provide information about systems individuals may use to "get attention" when they return to community living. As with all assistive technology issues relevant information is always a function of an individual's unique physical abilities and living situation.

The following provides information about the various methods for getting attention and describes situations where they may be used appropriately. These methods are presented in order of reliability from most to least reliable.

## ● **Emergency Response Systems**

Emergency response systems are intended for getting quick outside response to medical or other emergencies. Although there are several companies providing this kind of service we generally use Lifeline locally. There are Lifeline locations in forty-four hospitals across British Columbia.

An individual summons help by pressing a button worn as a pendant or a wristband or by activating a switch. Our clients often use a sip and puff switch.

Within seconds of activating the button or switch a Lifeline representative responds through a sensitive speaker monitor and asks what the problem is. The representative is able to determine quickly what level of help is required. The user may be calling to tell of a minor problem that requires only a neighbour's assistance or to report an emergency in which case an ambulance, the fire department and/or the police will be dispatched immediately.

Approximate Cost: Installation \$50. Monthly Rental \$30.

An emergency response system like Lifeline is often chosen by individuals who live alone or who are unattended for some portion of the day.

You can get more information about Lifeline at [www.bclifeline.com](http://www.bclifeline.com). There you will find a listing and contacts for the forty-four offices throughout the province. If you do not have access to the internet you can get information by calling 1-800-543-3546.

There are a number of alternate emergency response providers listed in the yellow pages under Medical Alarms.

## ● Attendant Paging Systems

Most people are familiar with traditional hospital call bell systems. At G.F. Strong there is a call bell at each bed position. The patient is provided with an activator of some kind. Often it is a rubber switch about the size of a small saucer. For more physically involved clients we often substitute this with a sip and puff switch. When the switch is activated a light goes on outside the patient's room and the nursing station is signalled. These systems are hard-wired and not generally installed in private homes but there are exceptions.

A system like this may be used for an individual who has attendants close by but who needs to have a reliable means to get the attendant's attention. It may be used by individuals who are unable to speak loudly enough to call an attendant.

A local company called CP ElectroAlert provides attendant call bell systems for use in group and private homes. They have two kinds of systems:

- one uses RF (Radio Frequency) and existing power lines in the home to send the signals to other rooms.
- the other type is a hard-wired

Both can provide call signals in several rooms within a house. Of the two types the "hardwired" system is more like a hospital call bell system.

Get more information by visiting their website [www.cpelectroalert.bc.ca/contact.htm](http://www.cpelectroalert.bc.ca/contact.htm)

or by calling (604)-893-5244.

## 3. Convenience Systems

### a. Personal Pagers

There are a variety of pagers on the market. They comprise a transmitter and a receiver. The user presses the transmitter (or a switch that plugs into the transmitter) which causes the transmitter to beep or vibrate. The transmitter is usually carried by a family member or care attendant. The units are battery operated and transmission is accomplished through radio frequency. For these reasons the personal pagers are not as reliable as the systems presented above and are intended for convenience purposes only.

Enabling Devices, a company based in New York state, sells three personal paging products which may be appropriate for some individuals. These are 1) a beeping personal pager 2) a vibrating personal pager, and 3) a flashing strobe musical pager. You can get more information about and pictures of these by visiting [www.enablingdevices.com](http://www.enablingdevices.com). Enter "pager" in the keyword search and click on "go" for pictures

and descriptions of these. Products can be purchased directly from Enabling Devices or locally from Insight Media Centre Ltd. Their website is [www.insightmediacentre.com](http://www.insightmediacentre.com) and their telephone number is 604-581-2420.

Paging devices are often available in stores like Canadian Tire and Rona. Pagers purchased through these sources will generally not take a switch so may not be appropriate for individuals with compromised hand function.

## **b. Baby Monitors**

Baby monitors can be helpful for individuals who are unable to activate a switch but are able to make sounds to indicate they require assistance. A major drawback of a monitoring system is that every sound made in the individual's room is monitored thus providing little privacy for the user and constant "noise" for the attendant to screen and interpret.

There are several options on the market with perhaps the best source being ToysRUs. They have both auditory and video monitoring systems. A real advantage of dealing with ToysRUs is their very liberal return policy.

The following website reviews several baby monitors on the market today. [www.consumersearch.com/  
www/family/baby\\_monitors](http://www.consumersearch.com/www/family/baby_monitors)

## **c. A buzzer as part of a larger environmental control system**

Technology for Independent Living(TIL) is a branch of the BC Paraplegic Association. They set up environmental control systems for people with disabilities in British Columbia. These systems often include a convenience buzzer as one of the functions made available to the user.

If an individual requires a comprehensive environmental control system they should ask their community occupational therapist to contact TIL on their behalf at 604-326-0175.

Visit their website [www.tilbcpa.org](http://www.tilbcpa.org) for more information

## **Conclusion**

Selection of the best kind of system to address a particular situation is based on the individual needs of the user. These should be considered in light of each of the possibilities described above.

If you have any questions about which system is best for you or your family member please call the Assistive Technology and Seating Service at 604-737-6263 or email [cwengryn@vanhosp.bc.ca](mailto:cwengryn@vanhosp.bc.ca).