

AAMR F.Y.I. asked Dr. Michael Wehmeyer, Associate Professor of Special Education at the University of Kansas for an update on technology and mental retardation in 2002 and here's what he had to say.

**AAMR F.Y.I.:** What was the one major development in technology and mental retardation/developmental disabilities in the year 2002?

**Dr. Wehmeyer:** One of the major developments in technology and mental retardation/developmental disabilities over the past year was the emergence of palmtop computer with specially designed software as supports for people with mental retardation. Palmtop computers have a number of benefits with regard to their use, both by the general population and by people with mental retardation. They are portable, relatively inexpensive, and socially desirable. They operate using touch-screen technologies, thus eliminating problems of cognitive access with relation to mouse or keyboard use. Although palmtop computers have been in existence for a number of years, over the past year software and accessible operating systems for the palmtop to assist people with mental retardation in areas such as scheduling and time management, task completion, and decision-making. (See <http://www.ablelinktech.com/> for examples of such applications).

**AAMR F.Y.I.:** What impact has the palm top computer had on the field at large?

**Dr. Wehmeyer:** Unlike other technologies, there has been a relatively rapid transition from research and development to practice with palmtop technology. Palmtops have the potential to support people with mental retardation across a wide array of community environments and activities. With the expanding availability of digital camera technologies, programs can be personalized to provide specific employment, living or other activities at minimal cost.

**AAMR F.Y.I.:** What should we look out for on the technology front in 2003?

**Dr. Wehmeyer:** In 2003 and into the future we can expect to see the merger of technology like palmtop PCs with other rapidly developing technologies. As wireless technologies mature, it will be feasible to develop e-mail and internet-based software for palmtop computers that provide added capacity to palmtop technology through wireless Internet access. Furthermore, the expanded capacity of cellular phone technologies to incorporate wireless internet access, global positioning satellite data, transmission of digital images, and so forth will presumably merge with palmtop PC types of technologies to provide portable and inexpensive technologies incorporating all of those technologies which, in turn, will provide more options and opportunities to design supports for people with mental retardation.

Dr. Wehmeyer wishes to acknowledge Dan Davies and Steve Stock of AbleLink Technologies for this update. You can reach Dr. Wehmeyer at [wehmeyer@ku.edu](mailto:wehmeyer@ku.edu)