

Georgia Tech and Shepherd Study Wireless for Disabled

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Wireless technologies add flexibility and mobility to most users' lives, but disabled people often find access to these new technologies beyond their grasp. To address these challenges, Georgia Tech's Center for Advanced Communications Policy (CACAP) and the Shepherd Center, a catastrophic care hospital in Atlanta, have been awarded a \$4.75 million Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center (RERC) grant on wireless technologies aimed at enhancing the lives of people with disabilities.

This second five-year grant, awarded from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) under the U.S. Department of Education, supports the continuation of the innovative wireless activities undertaken during the first five years of the Wireless RERC at Georgia Tech and Shepherd.

"Our partnerships within Georgia Tech, the Shepherd Center, the wireless industry and other researchers, both domestically and abroad, have always promoted equitable access to wireless technologies for people with disabilities," says Dr. Helena Mitchell, CACP executive director and Wireless RERC principal investigator and co-director. "We look forward to the research and development of the RERC's new initiatives which also address this important field of study."

"We are very excited that continued funding has been awarded for the Wireless RERC," noted Dr. Michael Jones, Shepherd Center's vice president for research and technology and RERC co-director. "This award validates our accomplishments over the past five years and also affirms the growing importance of wireless technologies for disabled and non-disabled users alike."

The Wireless RERC will explore research and development of new wireless technology applications, as well as continue its work on

legislative, policy and regulatory monitoring and analysis. Dr. Mitchell added, "CACAP's past policy activities have contributed to regulatory changes at the Federal Communications Commission where the Wireless RERC was cited three times in rulemakings regarding advanced technologies and emergency communications."

Areas of new technology development include emergency communications, location-based services, advanced auditory interfaces for handheld electronic devices, and universal remote control systems that allow a cell phone to seamlessly operate other electronic devices and appliances. The RERC team will also partner with wireless product manufacturers, mobile wireless service providers, and consumer volunteers with disabilities to test and report on the usability of a variety of wireless devices. Results from this product testing will be used to create an online resource of wireless product reviews that highlight important usability features.

The Wireless RERC is one of 23 RERCs in the United States. Other RERCs are devoted to fields such as aging, hearing or vision-related disabilities, public transportation, workplace accommodations, universal design, wheeled mobility, and information technology access.

Georgia Tech participants in the Wireless RERC include the Center for Assistive Technology and Environmental Access (CATEA), College of Computing, Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI), Interactive Media Technology Center (IMTC), School of Psychology, School of Public Policy, and the Southeast Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center (SEDBTAC).

Source: Georgia Institute of Technology

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