



Prosthetic Devices Are Not A Luxury

n July 16th, 2015, a Medicare Local Coverage Determination was released proposing several detrimental changes to the prosthetic coverage available to amputees. The Amputee Coalition started a campaign to rescind this proposal and highlighted their six major concerns surrounding the proposal:

- Medicare would no longer consider an individual's potential functional abilities with an appropriate device when determining their prosthetic needs.
- Patients using an assistive device such as a cane, crutch, or walker would be limited to less functional prosthetic devices. If they have a higher functional level, Medicare would not pay for them to have a wheelchair.
- 3 Combining feet and ankles into a single code and limiting access to advanced technology would significantly harm an amputee's access to the feet and ankles that best meet their individual needs.
- 4 Prosthesis-wearers and their medical teams would not necessarily be able to select needed socket systems or liner inserts to ensure the most appropriate fit for their needs.

- 5 Individuals could be provided a less functional prosthesis or denied a device if they were unable to attain the "appearance of a natural gait," or if their medical record referenced certain health complications.
- 6 The Medicare proposal would redefine the rehabilitation process for amputees and force new amputees to rehab on out-of-date technology that they would not even use once they received their permanent device.

The amputee community throughout the U.S. joined forces to make their voices heard through an online "We the People" petition. This online petition system was established by the Obama Administration. If the petition gains 100 signatures, the issue becomes searchable within www.whitehouse.gov. If 100,000 signatures are added within 30 days, a response from the White House is required and a White House staff member will review the petition and ensure that it is sent to the appropriate policy experts to be addressed.

In less than 30 days the amputee community responded by affixing 109,000 signatures to the "We the People" petition! The Amputee Coalition released formal comments



during the open comment session and they urge everyone to submit letters to their representatives in Congress without delay.

Lastly, a social media campaign began with #NotALuxury to further awareness of the fact that a prosthetic device is not a luxury. We believe individuals with amputations deserve every advantage they can possibly get when it comes to dealing with limb loss.

For updates on the progress of the campaign to rescind the Medicare LCD proposal, visit our website (www. lawall.com), our Facebook page, or the Amputee Coalition's website (www. amputee-coalition.org). W

Rescind Medicare Proposal, Amputee Coalition of America "http://www.amputee-coalition.org"

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Lawall Orthotist Leads 'Climb For Change' for ROMP

warm heart and willing feet put Emily Woolston, CPO, at the head of a group of hikers trekking up Pennsylvania's Hawk Mountain this summer in order to raise funds and awareness for ROMP (Range of Motion Project), a global healthcare organization dedicated to providing orthotic and prosthetic care to those without access to these services.

Woolston, a certified prosthetist and orthotist at Lawall's Pottstown and Coopersburg offices, is an experienced climber who trekked Nepal three years ago with her equally energetic sister. Her July 26 expedition up Hawk Mountain, as ROMP's Pennsylvania Climb Captain for her team of eight adults and five children, may have been a "mild to moderate hike" by comparison, but its purpose was lofty. ROMP's "Climb for Change" was a carefully synchronized effort that placed as many as 26 climb teams on different mountains around the world on July 26—not only raising necessary funding for ROMP patients globally, but raising awareness of this 25th anniversary date of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Disabilities Treaty.

Woolston pulled her group together, provided "the advertising and the encouraging", and brought them to the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Kempton,

Pennsylvania, on this special day, where they were able to participate in another special event: the opening and celebration of the Sanctuary's first fully accessible ADA-approved hiking trail, which leads to the South Mountain Lookout, overlooking breathtaking valleys and seemingly endless miles of beauty.

It's a mountain she has hiked many times with her family, and still returns to several times each year. Her fondest memory is of climbing the mountain seven years ago with her then 1-year-old son and 80-year-old grandfather.

The recent landmark Climb for Change was a great success. Joining



forces with Cascade DAFO. Solt's Sawmill, and dedicated family and friends, Woolston raised over \$800. Jenni with Cascade DAFO not only made a generous donation, but also helped to organize and motivate the team of hikers for their climb.

Woolston was pleased to have attracted and inspired hikers of all levels and ages to participate. "We may not have climbed the highest peak of the many climbs that day around the world, but I think we had the youngest and cutest babies and children! We simply enjoyed the day in

sustainable clinic. I could understand and appreciate all the hard work and the complexity behind the project," she explained. "They just did a beautiful job! It's one thing for an organization to be helpful in starting a clinic, but it takes a different kind of organization to start up these projects and get all these multiple hikes going on the same day. It was pretty amazing that all around the world there were people coming together just for this little organization."

Even in the United States, she pointed out, there is great need for the help

> ROMP is striving to provide: "Plenty of people here don't always have the opportunities to get devices, and they face insurance barriers. Not every child is going to be given a foot that they can run on—or different devices when they break."

Funds raised by the July 26 Climb

for Change will help support the Guatemala prosthetic clinic. ROMP hopes to make the Climb an annual event, with future funds helping them to enhance the lives of amputees in Guatemala, Ecuador, and the U.S., and to expand their reach into other countries around the world.

Woolston continues to volunteer her time and skill to help others, as well, supporting efforts sponsored by the Haiti Hospital Appeal and the Haiti Health Trust. She has previously made the trip to Haiti to fit braces for those in need, and plans to return to serve again in the new year. 🦋



the summer heat, working up a sweat to climb to the top of the mountain.

"This is something we wish for all people—to be able to get out with family and friends, push oneself to reach a goal, and to be aware of the natural beauty all around us."

She first learned about ROMP and its goals by sitting in on a presentation at the ACPOC (Association of Children's Prosthetic-Orthotic Clinics) annual meeting, during which they discussed their fully-sustainable clinic in Guatemala.

"Havina gone to Haiti recognizing the value of providing a

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Juan Cave with a challenge that required him to think even further outside the box than usual in developing a customdesigned orthotic solution.

Corbitt's 15-year history of her battle with advancing rheumatoid arthritis (RA) reads like a profile in courage. An autoimmune disease, RA causes the body to attack its own tissue and joints with slow and painful inevitability. Bone erosion and joint deformity can result, and even internal organs can be affected. When she successfully dealt with RA's attacks on her knees and hips by undergoing replacement surgery for all four joints, the disease targeted another area—her left elbow.

After more months of struggling with increasing pain levels, Corbitt found that another joint replacement was the only pain-relief option left to her. Based on her past experience, she anticipated that the elbow replacement surgery and its aftermath would be as free from complications as her knee and hip procedures had been.

Corrective surgery to tighten the artificial elbow revealed a more serious problem; the RA had progressively weakened her bone to such an extent that a hole had formed, and a new, more substantial replacement elbow joint was needed—demanding additional and more invasive surgery.

Undaunted, Corbitt agreed to undergo the second replacement surgery. It did indeed relieve her pain, but her strength in that arm never returned—she was unable to lift more than five pounds, and began to wear a doctorprescribed sling to support the arm.

Ultimately it was discovered that the RA had continued its attacks on the weakened bone to such an extent that there was no bone left to support the artificial elbow joint, whose functional hardware had to be removed.

Although Corbitt was fortunate to retain movement in her hand and fingers, the elbow was non-functional. Her right hand was needed to support her left arm while she used her left hand—a not very practical solution, which failed to allow her to perform many of her normal daily activities.



Disappointment and frustration would have been natural and understandable responses for most people in her shoes. But Corbitt brought her problem, her trust, her patience—and some cheerful optimism—to Juan Cave.

Grace presented similarly to an upper extremity amputee because her left arm was essentially useless; but the great advantage she had over an amputee was the fact that she had the use of her fingers. Useful function of the arm could be restored by a device that could help position her elbow at the appropriate angle for each specific task she needed to accomplish.

Juan's challenge was to create such a device—and with Corbitt's help and input, working in partnership, he was able to conceptualize and build an orthosis that provided her with the greatest level of independence possible. Fabricating the device from scratch demanded that Juan draw on his experience with a variety of materials, components and concepts, even those developed originally for prosthetic use.

Beginning with raw materials, he created a custom elbow

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- Juan Cave, Orthotist

orthosis that Corbitt was able to use happily and successfully. The humerus cuff was made of leather, similar to the triceps cuff on a prosthesis for upper extremity amputees. The cuff ensured a total contact fit and increased the comfort level of the orthosis. The elbow joint was a Hosmer flail elbow joint with eight different lock positions. Initially a figure 9 harness—which is commonly used in upper extremity prosthetics—controlled the orthosis, allowing the elbow to be locked or unlocked by scapular abduction.

Over a period of several months, and after several fittings to adjust, fine-tune and improve its performance, Corbitt was using the orthosis efficiently at home and gaining confidence and independence. Eventually, the harness was removed because she preferred to manually lock the elbow in place with her right arm.

This is the case with many orthotic and prosthetic devices—the end product has often evolved considerably from the original idea, but is greatly improved during the process. Through utilizing the device at each stage of development and working closely with the practitioner in a cooperative partnership, each patient actively contributes to the optimal outcome they achieve together.

The practitioner's role is to critically evaluate each patient

and provide him or her with a device that can be modified and improved as the patient progresses through rehab. Corbitt's enthusiasm, optimism, and commitment to fulfilling her own role in the partnership made an unforgettable impression on Cave, who admired her great attitude and outlook on life.

"Ms. Corbitt is a highly motivated individual," he said. "When faced with a major life change she confronted the situation head-on, with a smile. With the orthosis she will be able to regain some of her independence and increase her ADLs."

Today, Corbitt is confidently tackling activities she once thought were forever beyond her reach. She proudly reports being able to drive, perform household tasks, and cook in the kitchen. She has even started an exercise program and is on the path to a healthier and enjoyable lifestyle!

Encouraging others who are facing similar challenges is one of her new priorities; Corbitt wants to help them realize that, regardless of their situation, creative options are available to maximize their independence and dramatically change their lives.





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Cost-Effectiveness Study Confirms Value of O&P Care

esearch on orthotic and prosthetic devices often focuses on determining the functional benefits of orthotic and prosthetic devices. Several years ago the Amputee Coalition of America and the American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association commissioned health care consulting firm Dobson DaVanzo & Associates, LLC, to conduct a retrospective analysis on Medicare claims data for orthotic and prosthetic (O&P) services. The purpose of their study was not to determine the functional benefit of O&P services for a patient, but rather to determine if there is a financial benefit for the government or private payors to cover O&P services for their clients.

Dobson DaVanzo & Associates, LLC, focused on three specific groups: those receiving lower extremity orthoses, those receiving spinal orthoses, and those receiving lower extremity prostheses. Within these groups they analyzed healthcare utilization, medicare payments, and level of negative outcomes. Comparisons of patients within all three groups demonstrated that patients who received O&P services had less healthcare utilization, fewer negative outcomes, and/or lower Medicare payments overall than those who received no O&P services.

The methodology for this retrospective cohort study began with requesting a custom cohort dataset spanning from 2007-2010 from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS).

"Beneficiaries were included in the study group if they had received an O&P service between January 1, 2008 and June 30, 2009, and had pre-determined etiological diagnoses of interest. Additionally, patients who received a lower extremity prosthetic were required to have had an amputation within the preceding 12 months

in order to be considered for participation in the study. Comparison group patients who did not receive O&P services were matched to study group patients (one-to-one) through propensity score matching techniques that control for observable selection bias based on etiological diagnosis, comorbidities, patient characteristics (age, gender, race) and historical health care utilization one year prior to the etiological diagnosis." (Dobson, ES2)

The study group of Lower Extremity Orthoses recipients was analyzed over an 18 month period. The average age of this group was 70 years of age. Patients who received

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an orthotic had a significantly lower Medicare 'per member per month' (PMPM) payment over the 18 months, which could be attributed to a lower acute care admission rate for the O&P service group. The report also indicated that over the 18 months patients with O&P services were more likely to avoid facility based care, which is reflected in their fewer admissions into skilled nursing facilities and more home health admissions. The study group did have higher payments for DME services and more therapy sessions. The study group did not have a lower incidence of falls and fractures, but they did have a lower rate of emergency room admissions. "The results of this analysis suggest that despite the receipt of the lower extremity orthotic, study group patients were able to withstand more intensive therapy that led to increased standing ability, resulting in fewer emergency room admissions, hospitalizations, and lower Medicare payments." (Dobson 14)

At the end of the 18 months the study group's Medicare payments were 10 percent less than the comparison group, even including the price of the orthotic device. Therefore,

the payor immediately saved money by providing the orthosis.

In the Spinal Orthoses group there was not a significantly different PMPM payment difference for the study and comparison group. However, there was a difference in how the payments were spent over the 18-month period.

The group with the spinal orthoses had higher DME

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Cost-Effectiveness Study Confirms Value of O&P Care

payments and payments for physician visits, whereas a larger portion of the comparison group's payments went to Skilled Nursing Facilities and other forms of inpatient rehabilitation. "This would suggest that while patients who received spinal orthoses had comparable Medicare episode payments to those who did not receive them, they used less facility based care and appear more likely to have remained at home and received home health care or outpatient visits than the comparison group of patients." (Dobson 17)

The lower extremity prostheses group had several challenges that were not present in the other two groups. The study was only able to match 428 pairs. The group of patients selected had to have undergone an amputation within the last 12 months. Of the 428 matches almost half died within the 12 month period. Furthermore, the analysis was only conducted over a 12-month period and not an 18-month period because after 12 months the Medicare payments can no longer be

attributed to the prosthesis. The PMPM Medicare payments for the study group over the 12 months were higher, but not significantly higher than the comparison group. The expense of the prosthesis and the inpatient and outpatient therapy involved with the training was balanced out by the comparison group's larger payment for acute care hospitalization.

In conclusion, this study has highlighted that the cost of O&P services is justified. The cost of the devices is important to highlight, since O&P devices are an expensive upfront cost for the Payor. But the unmeasurable benefits they also offer should not be overlooked, especially if the cost of the orthosis or prosthesis reduces costs for payors in other areas. If payors are going to make payments for medical needs for their clients, it is better that their investment in such services results in more active and independent clients. The overall wellbeing of each individual can be improved with a little foresight regarding what is likely to lie ahead for them if medical issues are not addressed.

Dobson DaVanzo & Associates, "Retrospective Cohort Study of the Economic Value of Orthotic and Prosthetic Services Among Medicare Beneficiaries" Vienna, VA, 2013.





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For more information about the state-of-the-art C-Leg 4, and to discover if you are a candidate for this amazing technology, call or visit any of Lawall's office locations.





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