Orthotics Prosthetics Canada

The leading authority on the orthotic and prosthetic profession.
*Credentialing * Regulating * Educating * Relations*

FACT SHEET

Credentialed vs Non-credentialed Orthotic Providers

Ensuring patient safety requires credentialed and accountable providers.

Introduction

Orthoses (braces) are integral devices that treat morbidities for a wide range of medical conditions. A representative but not exhaustive list includes:

- Stroke
- Cerebral Palsy
- Acquired Brain Injury
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Spinal Cord Injury
- Plagiocephaly
- Diabetes
- Spina Bifida
- Polio
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Arthritis (Rheumatoid and OA)
- Congenital Anomalies
- Guillian Barre Syndrome
- Charcot Marie Tooth
- Peripheral Neuropathy
- Hemiplegia

The primary purpose for orthoses are to facilitate mobility, manage pain and prevent injury and co-morbidities. Examples of orthoses include knee braces, ankle foot orthoses, upper extremity braces, helmets, spinal and neck braces. Orthoses are complex devices requiring considerable foundation knowledge of medical conditions and practical training to assess the causes of mobility deficiencies for the determination of appropriate orthotic treatments and the proper fabrication and fit to ensure patient safety and treatment efficacy.

Treatment Process

An orthosis is not a 'one-size-fits all' type of device. The requirements of patients are unique to their individual biomechanical deficiencies, measurements and daily living needs. For this reason, effective orthoses are custom-made or custom-fit to each patient.

The treatment process typically involves the following steps:

1. *Prescription/Referral Obtained*
2. *Thorough assessment of patient*
3. *Development of treatment plan*
4. *Measure, design & fabricate*
5. *Client interface (fit & adjustment)*
6. *Patient evaluation*
7. *Follow-up Care*

Orthotic Expertise

Experts evaluate and design solutions for patients requiring an orthosis due to muscle/bone impairment, disease or deformity. The health practitioner needs to consider and understand the underlying medical cause and resulting morbidities, as well as the overall health and lifestyle of the patient to help define the outcomes required of the orthotic treatment.

Knowledge is required in the following areas:

- Biomechanics
- Anatomical landmarks (surface anatomy)
- Tissue characteristics/management
- Musculoskeletal anatomy, including upper limb, lower limb, spinal
- Materials Science
- Neuroanatomy and neurophysiology
- Kinesiology, including upper limb, lower limb, spinal
- Planes of motion
- Pathologies (e.g., muscular, neurologic, skeletal, vascular)
- Fabrication

Risks of Orthotic Treatments

The primary purposes for orthoses are to facilitate mobility, manage pain and prevent injury and co-morbidities. An ineffective orthosis will not achieve the desired outcomes and can cause problems localized to the orthotic position or at locations elsewhere in the body. Risks include:

(continued on reverse)

Risks of Ineffective Orthoses

- Falls and injuries
- Skin Breakdown
- Co-Morbidities
- Pain
- Maladies not corrected
- Financial burden on patient
- Increased healthcare costs
- Delayed return to daily living

There are direct costs to the health care system by delaying treatments for orthotic treatment. For instance, prevention of amputation as a result of effective off-loading treatments for diabetic foot ulcers can save $75 million in Ontario health care costs. (Source: Diabetes Canada – www.diabetes.ca/offloadingdevices). The longer patients are in the health care system or on disability the higher the costs to the payer.

Legitimate Orthotic Providers

Legitimate orthotic providers are characterized as having all of the following qualities (specific to the orthotic treatments provided)

- Adequate knowledge and skill development through the acquisition of a degree or diploma from a recognized education institution
- Competencies assessed by a legitimate credentialing organization (in specific treatment area)
- Professional continuing education requirement
- Accountable to a legitimate oversight body for professional and ethical conduct
- Have patient care and patient safety as primary objective
- Recognized by provincial health care or private insurance as an authorized provider for specific treatment

It is important to understand that legitimate health providers in other disciplines may not be legitimate orthotic providers. It is essential that the education and competencies of the provider are appropriate for the conditions and treatments being provided.

Consequences of Illegitimate Providers

Case studies shared with Orthotics Prosthetics Canada of patient experiences (not provided by a Certified Orthotist CO(c)) include:

- Ankle Foot Orthotic fabricated at the wrong angle,
- Improperly fit brace causing skin breakdown
- Incorrect devices or treatments causing co-morbidities of the knees and other joints.
- Patients with conditions that are eligible for provincial health care coverage are not being informed and are paying for the devices out of pocket or through private health insurance.

Orthotic or prosthetic treatments are not reserved acts for any health profession. Therefore, treatments can be rendered by anyone whether they have the necessary competencies or not. Prescribers and patients should evaluate the above characteristics of legitimate providers before selecting their orthotic provider. Depending on the need, there is a choice of properly credentialed orthotic providers.

Orthotics Prosthetics Canada

Orthotics Prosthetics Canada (OPC) is the representative national organization for the prosthetic and orthotic profession, including approximately 450 certified clinicians and 150 registered technicians. OPC's role is to protect the public and advance the profession through quality standards of practice, professional credentialing, continued education, advocacy, and professional regulation.

Certified Orthotists CO(c) and Certified Prosthetists CP(c) are a self-regulated profession and accountable to an arm's length Professional Practice Committee for their professional conduct. CO(c) and CP(c) are authorized to submit claims to the provincial health care systems and are recognized due to the rigor of the qualifications to become certified, ongoing professional oversight and over 50 years of experience and exceptional professional conduct.

To become a Certified Orthotist CO(c) or a Certified Prosthetist CP(c) one must:

1. Complete a Bachelor of Science degree (or related) as a prerequisite,
2. Complete 2 years at an OPC accredited prosthetic and orthotic clinical program (BCIT or GBC),
3. Complete 2 years in a supervised residency,
4. Successfully challenge the national written and practical Board examinations.
5. Observe ethical standards established in Canons of Ethical Conduct.

For More Information:

Orthotics Prosthetics Canada ▪ 300 March Road, Suite 202 ▪ Ottawa, Ontario ▪ K2K 2E2
Phone: 613-595-1919 ▪ Email: info@opcanada.ca
www.opcanada.ca