



## **Certified Orthotist CO(c) versus a Non-credentialed 'Orthotist'**

The information below outlines why Certified Orthotists CO(c) are recognized by provincial governments and private insurance companies across the country as approved providers and the difference between a Certified Orthotist CO(c) and a non-credentialed individual referring to themselves as an 'orthotist'.

Certified Orthotist CO(c) is a registered trademark of Orthotics Prosthetics Canada (OPC) and only those that are CBCPO certified under OPC are legally able to utilize the title or its credential in Canada. If OPC is made aware of a non-certified individual utilizing the title or its credential, a cease and desist letter is sent demanding that the illegal use of the trademarks stop. OPC protects the trademarks on behalf of the profession quite vigorously for good reason, given that the requirements to become a Certified Orthotist CO(c) or Certified Prosthetist CP(c) takes years of education and training.

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

- complete a Bachelor of Science degree (or related) as a prerequisite to entry into an accredited P&O Post Graduate Program,
- successfully obtain a post-graduate diploma following two years of study at an OPC accredited prosthetic and orthotic clinical program (BCIT or GBC),
- following graduation, they must complete two years in an orthotic residency program under the supervision of a Certified Orthotist, and finally
- they must successfully challenge the national written and practical Board examinations.

The CBCPO certification process is recognized as rigorous and is designed to confirm certified professionals have the necessary competencies to ensure patient safety and to design effective treatment plans.

**“...competencies to ensure patient safety and to design effective treatment plans.”**

Certified Orthotists are the most trained and knowledgeable of any profession in head-to-toe orthoses and are subject matter experts in all areas of orthotic treatment including lower extremity, upper extremity, spinal, cranial and other specialized orthoses. Certified Orthotists CO(c) provide clinical assessment, technical design, fabrication, dispensing and follow up for all orthotic treatments.

In order to maintain certification, professionals must abide by a strict Canons of Ethical Conduct, pay annual professional fees and earn a minimum number of mandatory continuing education credits. A

process exists to receive complaints about ethical misconduct and sanctions can be as severe as losing the credential.

This difference between Certified Orthotists CO(c) and those non-certified orthotists is that none of the above requirements or conditions apply to non-certified orthotists. Certified Orthotists are a self-regulated health profession and takes great pride in their specialized knowledge. Non-certified orthotists are not credentialed, do not have ethical standards mandated, are not required to maintain skills through continuing education and are not responsible to any regulatory body. Because it is not a regulated health profession, anyone can call themselves an orthotist, which reinforces the value of the Certified Orthotist CO(c) title and credential. Despite being recognized as legitimate health care

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providers by all provincial governments, the small number of Certified Orthotists and Certified Prosthetists makes it financially infeasible to establish the mandated structure for a regulated health profession. Additionally, provincial governments recognize the deficiencies of their regulated health profession acts and are not interested in regulating any additional health professionals under the current Acts.

Orthotics Prosthetics Canada (OPC) is the representative national organization for the prosthetic and orthotic profession. Its role is to protect the public and advance the profession of prosthetics and orthotics through quality standards of practice, professional credentialing, education and awareness. The four priority pillars for OPC are:

- Professional Credentialing
  - Residency and Internship programs
  - National Board Examinations
  - Certification and Registration of Professionals
- Regulation of Profession
  - Developing Practice Standards
  - Establishing Ethical Guidelines
  - Monitoring Ethical Conduct
- Continuing Education
  - Enhancing Knowledge and Skills
  - Mandatory Continuing Education Program
- Stakeholder Relations
  - Education and Awareness of Key Stakeholders

As you can see there is a very significant gap between what a Certified Orthotist CO(c) brings to the table versus a non-certified orthotist. Patient safety is not only a priority concern for Certified Orthotists it is an obligation. Patients, payers and allied health professions can have confidence that Certified Orthotists CO(c) are the gold standard in terms of their qualifications and will achieve the best outcomes. For these reasons, as well as a long standing history of competent and ethical conduct, it is our position that only Certified Orthotists CO(c) should be authorized to submit claims for public or private reimbursement.

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Below are some links to additional documents that can provide more information. OPC would be pleased to have a discussion to answer any further questions. Do not hesitate to contact OPC, if you have any additional questions.

**Links**

<https://opcanada.ca/english/the-profession/scopes-of-practice.html>

<http://www.opcanada.ca/english/the-profession/about-certified-orthotists-coc.html>

<http://www.opcanada.ca/english/the-profession/opc-canons-of-ethical-conduct.html>

<http://www.opcanada.ca/english/certified-professionals/certified-professionals.html>

<https://opcanada.ca/english/resources/find-a-professional>

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