

# Undervaluing Services Provided vs. Overcharging Patients

How much should you be charging for orthotics?

BY CINDY PEZZA, PMAC

*This article is written exclusively for PM and appears courtesy of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management. The AAPPM has a forty-plus year history of providing its member DPM's with practice management education and resources.*

As the world of health-care continues to evolve (or shall we say change, as the word “evolve” suggests some sort of improvement or advance), and an ever-expanding number of valuable ancillary services are deemed “non-covered” or “experimental”, patients find themselves caught between the expert advice of their physicians and the fine print of their insurance contracts. For this reason, it is increasingly important to maintain a high level of professionalism in developing proven treatment plans (protocols) that focus on patients and their specific conditions, not their insurance cards or pocketbooks.

Each patient encounter should begin with a thorough evaluation including an “interview” to obtain the necessary information, as well as any diagnostic testing needed, to determine and confirm the proper diagnosis. Once a diagnosis has been made, the cause of the condition should then be explained in

a manner that is clear and concise (avoiding “doctor speak”, whenever possible). Once the patient has been educated about a condition as well as the possible reasons for onset, a treatment plan, clearly demonstrating the path towards improvement or resolution should be reviewed in detail. Speaking in layman’s terms

answer frequently asked questions such as “I can’t remember, should I put ice or heat on my heel?” will improve the odds that your patients understand the importance of following the recommended treatment plan, thus improving compliance, as well as the rate of achieving positive outcome. This is also a beneficial

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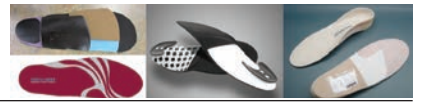
and utilizing visual cues such as anatomy posters and models is most effective when communicating with your patients. Your treatment plan should include written instructions based on condition, educational handouts, and links to reputable online resources (including your own website).

Keep in mind that your patients only hear about 25% of what you tell them. So educating your staff members and assuring that they are aware of the details of your most frequently recommended treatment plans will allow you to see a higher volume of patients without having to repeat yourself multiple times. Having a well-trained support staff that can

method of increasing referrals from existing patients. Those who see significant improvement in a reasonable amount of time are much more likely to suggest your services to their family and friends.

The million dollar question that all podiatrists have asked themselves at one time or another is: “How much should I be charging for my custom orthotics?” If you haven’t asked the question, or pondered if you are under-charging, over-charging, or need to increase your price every couple of years just to stay current with inflation, you are by far the exception to the rule. In fact, one of the most common topics

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## Undervaluing (from page 125)

of discussion at conferences and biomechanics seminars is not the newest casting technique or 3-D scanner, it is price point. Every podiatrist wants to know how his/her price compares to others, and how a much higher dollar value is justified.

Let us consider the value of your time as a foot and ankle expert who has invested years in perfecting the art of successful correction of biomechanical abnormalities. We may also consider that by the time patients make an appointment to see a podiatrist, they have tried the home remedies suggested by their Aunt Linda and *WebMD*, or they have gone and purchased several pairs of gel inserts and other “quality” products offered at local malls. These patients are desperate for a resolution to their foot (and/or knee, hip, and back) pain and are looking to you, the doctor of podiatric medicine, the “foot guru” to help them.

Now, let’s consider the cost of your devices. How much are you paying to have the cast or scan of your patient’s feet, accompanied by your prescription, fabricated into a quality device that will achieve your anticipated outcome? And, how much is that device worth to the patient who can now stand comfortably all day at work, or walk around Disney World with their family, making memories

that last a life time—minus the excruciating heel pain?

The answer to the first question varies tremendously depending on the lab you are using, the location, and the turn-around time (national averages range from \$60-\$150/pair). The answer to the second question is a little more complicated as it would probably resemble something out of an American Express commercial: Priceless. For these reasons, finding a happy medium that incorpo-

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rates the experience and knowledge of the specialist, the actual cost of fabrication, as well as the impact of a custom device that can significantly improve quality of life, is something that only the prescribing doctor can decide. Many undervalue their services and charge only slightly above what they pay their lab, while a select few charge astronomical amounts, and justify it by saying, “You get what you pay for.”

No matter what you choose to charge for your custom orthotics, or how much the few insurers who cover the devices may deem “allowable”, ultimately, it is a matter of how much you value your time and the personal service you are providing to your patients. You are treating the patient, the diagnosis, the cause of the condition, and providing a valuable resolution that has a great impact on all aspects of daily living. No insurance card or credit card should ever set a price tag on that service; it is all up to you. **PM**

*The American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management (AAPPM) has a forty-year history of providing its member podiatrists with practice management education and resources they need to practice efficiently and profitably, through personal mentoring and sharing of knowledge. To contact AAPPM call 978-686-6185, e-mail [aappmexecdir@aol.com](mailto:aappmexecdir@aol.com) or visit [www.aappm.com](http://www.aappm.com), or circle #150 on the reader service card.*



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