



Let's Talk About Orthotics Today

It's important to stress the value of these often non-covered devices.

BY CINDY PEZZA

As we continue to make our way through the COVID-19 pandemic, a constantly changing new normal poses challenges never before experienced. In some areas of the country, practices that were beginning to see close to pre-COVID patient volume were forced to slow down once again with regional surges in infection rates. Practices in other areas that were more cautious in implementing re-opening phases are still trying to get back on their feet and constantly adjusting systems and protocols in order to keep patients, staff, and doctors as safe as possible. No matter where you live and practice or which phase of re-opening you are currently experiencing, there is one constant that we can always count on: insurance and the ever-expanding number of valuable services deemed as “non-covered.” With each passing year, patients find themselves caught between the expert medical advice of their physicians and the fine print of their insurance contracts, while physicians are forced to jump through hoops to provide medically necessary treatment.

One example of this conundrum that has become more and more problematic and continues to worsen is the significant decline in custom orthotic insurance coverage and allowed amounts. Right now, it is especially evident as existing patients return to the office and new patients come

out of the woodwork, both as a result of stay-at-home orders which generally went one of two ways: too much Netflix and noshing or, non-athletes becoming over-zealous marathoners overnight. For these reasons, it is increasingly important to maintain a high level of professionalism in developing proven treatment plans (protocols)

practices are making additional efforts to improve efficiencies and limit potential exposure time and contact by conducting pre-visit interviews (for new patients or patients who have not presented in quite some time). Once a patient is appointed to the schedule and a reason for the visit is recorded, insurance eligibility (determining

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that focus on patients and their specific conditions, not their insurance card or wallet.

Given the current situation, many

active coverage) and benefit checks (specific to reason for visit and practice specific treatment protocols) are performed, and a review of plan details (deductibles and other out of pocket costs that may be incurred during the visit) is conducted. This information is then available to discuss with the patient during the pre-visit interview call. It is especially helpful to inform patients with high deductibles or unusually large co-pays of your practice financial policy and an approximation of what will be due at the time of service.

Once this information has been relayed to the patient, the interview takes place and the electronic health record

Continued on page 90





Orthotics Today (from page 89)

is populated with the medical and surgical history, medications, allergies, and family history. Pre-visit interviews are dramatically reducing the amount of time that new patients spend in the reception area and treatment room. They also allow staff members and doctors to prepare more thoroughly prior to the clinic encounter and to spend far less time performing data entry.

Returning to the subject of custom orthotics, there is one question that most podiatrists have asked themselves at one time or another: “How much should I be charging?” In fact, one of the most common topics of discussion at conferences and biomechanics seminars (virtual and face-to-face), is not the latest casting technique or 3-D scanner—it is price point. Every podiatrist wants to know how his or her price compares to others and how a higher dollar value is justified.

Let us consider the value of your

worth to the patient who can now stand comfortably all day at work, meet their 10,000-step-a-day fitness goal, or walk around Disney World with their family, making memories that last a lifetime?

staff member who could benefit (that’s all of them) should wear orthotics and show them to patients often.

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People (patients) will spend money where they find value, and so the dollar amount associated with your custom orthotics is a representation of your time and expertise.

The answer to the first question varies widely depending on the lab you are using, the location, and turn-around time (national averages range from \$70-\$150/pair). The answer to the second question is a little more complicated as it would probably resemble something out of the old American Express commercials: Priceless. For these reasons, finding a happy medium that incorporates

tom orthotics is a representation of your time and expertise. In prescribing and dispensing custom orthotics, you are not only arriving at a diagnosis and treating a patient’s current symptoms, you are also identifying the underlying causes of the condition and providing solutions that improve and maintain healthy and active lifestyles. **PM**



Cindy Pezza began her career in specialty practice management in 2002, working in a multitude of capacities, and finally holding the position of office manager, in a successful podiatry practice in the South Shore area

of Massachusetts. Years later, as President and CEO of Pinnacle Practice Achievement, Cindy continues to utilize her experience and expertise to promote development and implementation of structured systems and protocols in both administrative and clinical aspects of practice, consulting with physicians and staff to improve the quality of patient care while significantly increasing practice revenue. Cindy travels nationally as a speaker and program coordinator for state and national podiatric organizations, provides private office consulting to established and start-up practices, offers online subscription programs, lectures on practice management related topics to future podiatrists at Kent State University College of Podiatric Medicine, serves as Chief Operating Officer for Podiatric Super Group Management, and composes frequent articles and responses for podiatric journals and publications. Cindy was honored with a lifetime achievement award in 2020, inducting her as the 14th non-podiatrist into the *Podiatry Management* Hall of Fame. At home, Cindy enjoys spending time with family and friends, participating as both student and instructor in yoga and barre classes and spoiling her rescue dogs.

If you truly believe in custom orthotics, then you and any staff member who could benefit (that’s all of them) should wear orthotics and show them to patients often.

time as a foot and ankle specialist who has invested years in perfecting the art of successful correction of biomechanical insufficiencies both conservatively and surgically. We may also consider that by the time a patient makes an appointment to see you, they have listened to recommendations of family and friends, read up on WebMD, and have tried several pairs of OTC inserts with little relief. 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, for a solution.

Now let’s consider the cost of your devices. How much are you paying to have casts or a scan of your patient’s feet, accompanied by your prescription, fabricated into quality devices to achieve optimal outcome? And how much are those devices

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 are things that only the prescribing doctor (DPM) can decide.

Some podiatrists choose a low price point (let’s say on or below the \$300 mark) to meet the perceived financial needs of their patient population and still find that they have trouble dispensing devices. Others charge more than double that amount and use the mantra “You get what you pay for” and dispense a higher than average number of devices. In either case, you should be confident with your prescription and recommendation, the fabrication process, and quality of product as well as your ability to achieve desired outcomes as a result of patient compliance. If you truly believe in custom orthotics, then you and any