

BEST PRACTICES FOR EVALUATING LOWER LIMB PROSTHETIC USERS IN A PHYSICAL THERAPY CLINIC

Delgado, C. MSPO, CPO¹, Koykas, D. PTA²

Prosthetics and Orthotic Associates¹ Dynamic Physical Therapy²

cassandra@poaprosthetics.com

INTRODUCTION

Reimbursement for prosthetic care is becoming increasingly difficult due to insurance providers limiting access to essential services. Prosthetic providers and patients struggle with frequent denials for prosthetic care. Because of the increase in audits, additional frequency of claim denials, an increased in cost of goods, and worldwide healthcare pandemic, prosthetic providers have needed to implement new protocols to maintain a viable practice. This has led to prosthetic practices becoming more creative in their approach to prosthetic care.

Furthermore, it has been crucial for prosthetic practices to maintain strong relationships with referral sources and other interdisciplinary members of the healthcare team. Creating a healthcare team with a strong understanding of optimal prosthetic outcomes is critical for patient success by demonstrating the positive impact of prosthetic usage on the user's life and enabling a better rehabilitation strategy.^{1,2} Majority of physical therapists have limited prosthetic experience and training, making it difficult to obtain supportive documentation and optimal gait training. It also raises question to the level of improvement a patient could expect if being treated by a therapist with limited prosthetic experience. As of current literature, no evidence-based of the best practice guidelines for physiotherapy for amputees has been established. In general, studies show the importance of strengthening exercises as well as gait training for prosthesis use, in the case of lower limb amputees³.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this discussion is to provide best practices for creating a collaborative environment for prosthetists to work alongside a physical therapy team. Due to increased demands, many prosthetists are seeing patients outside of the traditional clinic setting. More often now, prosthetists are evaluating and fitting a patient in the patient's physical therapy office. Although working with a patient outside of a traditional prosthetic office can be challenging, by implementing best practice strategies, prosthetists can become more successful with their patient outcomes and community relationships. The purpose of this presentation is to create a collaborative discussion on how to optimize working with a physical therapist.

IMPLEMENTATION

Prosthetists should obtain permission to join a physical therapy appointment by both the patient and the physical therapist. The prosthetist should ensure they have brought all necessary tools and equipment for the fitting. By creating a checklist for what should be brought, it can make for a more efficient appointment.

While at the physical therapists office, a prosthetist should discuss if there is an optimal place to work that does not interfere with others. Prosthetists should collaborate with therapists and patient on prosthetic goals and expectations for the patient's current presentation. For therapists with limited prosthetic understanding, they should be educated on how to track and understand limb volume. Therapists should also be educated on the basics of socket pressures and evaluating prosthetic alignment using various technologies

Giving examples of optimal documentation can assist therapists in understanding insurance expectations. Discussions of gait training and exercises are also helpful for establishing goals and minimizing gait deviations. After establishing a relationship with the therapy team, it is recommended that a telehealth system for evaluating patient needs is created. This allows for members of each party to virtually join appointments when questions or concerns arise, when an in-person visit may not be feasible due to schedule constraints.

RESULTS

Remaining organized and bringing all necessary supplies to a prosthetic appointment outside the traditional office leads to improved visit efficiencies and minimizes frustrations on both patient and multidisciplinary team. When prosthetists join a physical therapy appointment, they can establish improved relationships and levels of trust with patients, especially for a new prosthetic user. This provides the framework a collaborative approach to their care.

Physical therapists that have support from their local prosthetist are more successful with producing proper documentation. Therapists working alongside prosthetists are also more knowledgeable of outcome measures pertaining to prosthetic users and understand the significance of functional level testing.

The physical therapists and prosthetists benefit from being able to analyze socket pressures discuss alignment together. This shared knowledge leads to more effective goal-setting. By better understanding socket pressures, therapists can help guide patients with volume management tools. There are additional safety benefits to working within a physical therapy office, especially in those with harness systems and additional adaptive equipment.

As relationships with the physical therapists grow, this enhances both the patient success and business development. Working with physical therapists can create marketing collaborations and increase referrals to your respective practices.

CONCLUSION

Patients directly benefit when there is open communication and collaboration between members of their healthcare team. When working alongside a prosthetist, physical therapists have the opportunity to increase their knowledge base and expertise. Therapists enhance their documentation skills to best assist their patients. Prosthetists gain physical therapy experience by learning exercise techniques and modalities while working alongside therapists. This collaborative environment produces improved patient outcomes and indicates higher patient satisfaction.

REFERENCES

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