The Capacity of the Prosthetic Profession to Provide Lower Extremity Prosthetic Limbs Within the State of Georgia

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Background and Significance: Due primarily to the aging “baby boomer” population, and a sharp rise in diabetes and obesity - conditions known to increase the risk for amputation - demand for prosthetic services is thought to be increasing considerably nation wide. The current literature suggests there is a practitioner shortage which is on track to worsen substantially in the coming years as demand for services quickly outpaces capacity. The purpose of this study was to investigate the current capacity of the prosthetic profession in the state of Georgia to provide services.

Methods: In an effort to approximate the number of lower limbs produced, 2000 & 2004 prosthetic foot sales and returns data was solicited from all U.S. manufacturers and distributors of prosthetic feet. The number of Medicare billing codes for lower limb prosthesis (excluding partial foot) submitted to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) in 2000 and 2004 was solicited from Palmetto GBA, the Durable Medical Equipment Regional Carrier (DMERC) for Medicare Region C. This information was used to corroborate prosthetic foot sales data by extrapolating the Medicare information assuming Medicare sales represent 58% of total sales (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality). The '00 and '04 GA practitioner numbers were obtained from the prosthetic certifying agencies. Number of limbs fabricated per practitioner was estimated assuming 95% of practitioners are in clinical practice and that Certified Prosthetists Orthotists (CPOs) dedicate 50% of their time to prosthetics.

Results: 13 of 16 prosthetic manufacturers/distributors provided data. 2,578 feet were sold in '00 and 3,377 were sold in '04. Palmetto GBA processed 1,408 prosthetic “base codes” in '00 and 1,521 in '04, representing 54.6% and 45.0% of total foot sales respectively. Assuming Medicare sales to represent 58% of total limbs produced results in 2,427 limbs in '00 and 2,622 in '04. 37 prosthetists and 43 prosthetist/orthotists operated in GA in '00. There were 37 prosthetists and 53 prosthetist/orthotists in '04. Based on prosthetic foot sales data, limbs fabricated per practitioner was 46 in '00 and '56 in '04. Taking Medicare sale to represent 58% of total sales, limbs fabricated per practitioner equaled to 44 in '00 and 44 in 04.

Conclusion: While an inconsistency in Medicare data to foot sales appears to exist in the years studied, the data collected represents the best estimate of capacity currently available, and the only study to capture services rendered beyond Medicare beneficiaries. National prosthetic foot sales data could prove extremely useful in this regard; however, potentially difficult obtain. Further study is required to evaluate the accuracy of Medicare payer mix as a useful means to estimate total sales. The information generated by this study is of limited use without knowledge of the demand for services. Future work should be directed towards generating regional and national incidence & prevalence data.
References from Presentation: