

15 Things You Should Know to Make the Most of the Medicare Therapeutic Shoe Program

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The Medicare Therapeutic Shoe Program represents a WIN – WIN – WIN opportunity for patients, podiatrists as well as Medicare. If qualified patients are correctly fit with shoes, they stand a reduced chance of amputation and infection besides getting shoes they would enjoy wearing. Podiatrists can significantly add to their practice as qualified patients are covered for a new pair of shoes with inserts each year. Finally, if patients are correctly fit with shoes and know to inspect their feet for signs of irritation every day, costly complications can be avoided and significant amounts of money can be saved by Medicare.

The following are suggestions to best accommodate patients as well as make shoe fitting as efficient as possible.

Make one person in office responsible for fitting, ordering and returning shoes.

It works best when one person sees orders through from start to finish. Without doing so, items can fall through the cracks including shoes not getting ordered, required paperwork not obtained from MD, shoes not logged in when received, patients not appointed to pick up shoes, Medicare not billed as well as shoes not returned if they do not fit.

Use a fitting set of try on shoes.

Stocking a small number of shoes in select sizes will decrease the guesswork in fitting associated with using a measuring stick or Brannock device. Utilizing a small sizing inventory will improve fit rates from approximately 85 to 90 percent to around 95 percent.

Have an annual recall system.

Medicare allows patients new shoes and insets each calends year. Create a routine whereby patients are mailed a letter including such information that shoes and inserts should be replaced when worn. Your advertising should not direct patients to simply come in for a new free pair of shoes. For patients who return regularly for routine care, you might incorporates a system whereby a reminder is created to remind you that patient had received shoes and when a year had passed.

Have shoe samples to show to patients. Put a display in the waiting room.

Nothing works as wells as “What you see is what you get”. Medicare doesn’t require shoes to look ugly. Shoe manufacturers are doing a good job of creating styles that are so attractive that that non-New Medicare-diabetic, patients will want to pay for them out of pocket.

Advertise

Therapeutic shoe companies can provide you with well designed ad layouts that can be customized to your office. Medicare states that it is not okay to tell patients that item are free nor can that delivery be assured without first determining that patent meets the qualifying criteria.

When presenting patients a variety of shoe styles, limit style choices to models most appropriate for patient needs.

It is best to direct patients towards styles most appropriate to their therapeutic needs. Suggestions include styles that are lightest weight, those with Velcro closures, soft stretchy uppers and athletic. Showing patients actual shoe samples is always better than pointing towards pictures as a "what you see is what you get" approach will result in fewer surprises when patient returns to pick up shoes.

Know when to go to custom shoes.

Approximately 10 percent of patients have therapeutic needs that exceed what's possible with depth shoes and are most appropriately addressed with custom molded shoes. Such conditions include Charcot deformity and partial foot amputations. Either cast these patients for molded shoes or refer to another podiatrist, pedorthist or orthotist/prosthetist

Double check orders to make sure that size, style and color is that which is desired.

Avoid costly, inconvenient mistakes. "When you inspect more, you can expect more." Once in a while, the shoe ordered is not the shoe desired. Confirm your orders placed by viewing the order confirmation screen if order was placed on-line or else on sheet that is faxed back with every new shoe order.

If shoe does not fit when dispensed, reorder right away and return. Do not let patient take shoes.

Patients should be explained in advance that the reason for coming in to have shoes fit is to insure correct fit. On average, about 1 pair in 10 of shoes doesn't fit correctly. It would be dangerous to let a patient take a pair of shoes that could create foot problems.

Make sure that patient signs break-in instruction sheet and receives copy of Medicare Supplier Standards.

The break-in instruction sheet should have information on how to get used to shoes and what to look out for. You documents that you have reviewed Supplier Standards with patient.

Make sure that every order has required documentation:

MD Statement, DPM note or Rx, invoice from vendor, copy of signed certificate of delivery, acknowledgement of break-in instructions patient satisfaction.

Make sure that shoes fit before heat molding inserts

Prefabricated inserts can be returned to most shoe companies for a full refund so long as they are sent back in good enough condition that they can be resold to someone else. You should check shoe fit with the prefabricated inserts from to heat molding. Should the shoe fit not be good, you would not be able to return the inserts if you first heat molded them.

Don't write patient name on shoe box when shoes received.

If you write the patient name on the shoe box and the shoes do not fit and you return them, the shoe box will need to be replaced. Writing on the shoe box generally results in a deduction from the amount refunded. Suggestion is to write patient name and date received on a Postit and attach it to shoe box.

Return multiple pairs of shoes at a time.

Save on the cost of return postage as well as time preparing shipping boxes by returning several pairs of shoes at once. It doesn't cost much more and takes about the same amount of time to return 4 or 5 pairs of shoes together as it does a single pair.

Following these suggestions is sure to improve your ability to accurately fit patients and make use of the Medicare Therapeutic Shoe Program as hassle free as possible.

Josh White is the founder and President of SafeStep. He is Board Certified in Podiatric Orthopedics and a Certified Pedorthist with over 15 years experience providing diabetic preventative foot care. Dr. White has pioneered the development of affordable customized footwear to a wide range of patients with special needs or disabilities, from high performance athletes to functionally compromised or disabled patients. He has instructed the podiatric residents at Stanford and Beth Israel teaching hospitals and currently serves as an Instructor in the Biomechanics Departments of the California School and New York College of Podiatric Medicine and the Parsons School of Design. He is a corporate partner and advisor to the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management.