

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Custom Ankle Foot Orthoses - Bracing for Serious Conditions**

***Untrained providers rendering AFO treatments could endanger patient safety.***

**[Ottawa, Ontario – September 5, 2018]** Orthotics Prosthetics Canada (OPC) is aware of providers that are inadequately trained and rendering custom ankle foot orthotic (AFO) treatments. OPC feels compelled to issue a warning to the public, health professionals, as well as private and public payers.

Increasingly, Certified Orthotists CO(c) are seeing custom made AFOs delivered by unqualified providers that have been fabricated or fit with glaring errors that place the health and well-being of patients at risk. Problems have occurred around incorrect brace angles, improper fit causing skin breakdown and using incorrect devices causing co-morbidities of the knees and other joints. CO(c)s are also discovering that some patients, with conditions that could be covered by provincial health care coverage, are not being informed of their eligibility and are therefore paying for the devices out of pocket or through private health insurance.

Oversimplified, Ankle Foot Orthoses (AFOs) are L-shaped braces externally applied to the leg and foot which are used to:

- Improve or prevent a physical deformity
- Reduce pain
- Reduce the risk of tripping
- Stabilise a joint or joints
- Improve mobility or performance
- Reduce the risk of injury

They are commonly used orthoses for some serious conditions such as cerebral palsy, stroke, diabetes, arthritis and more. Click here to see our [Custom Ankle Foot Orthotic Fact Sheet](#).

The current training benchmark for adequate entry to practice knowledge for AFOs has been established by Certified Orthotists CO(c). The curricula at the two accredited 2-year post-degree orthotic and prosthetic programs in Canada include 280 hours of didactic, laboratory and clinical instruction specifically for AFOs.



These hours DO NOT include the practical experience obtained in AFO treatments during the 2 year (3450 hour) residency program, which is required to earn the Certified Orthotist CO(c) credential, and which follows the post-degree Prosthetic and Orthotic programs. Seventy percent (70%) of a Certified Orthotist's clinical time is spent in lower extremity orthotic areas and the majority of that time is spent on treatments with AFOs. (Professional Examination Services, 2014)

OPC President Dan Mead CPO(c) stated, "It is negligent to suggest that individuals with little or no training on AFO treatments including the underlying medical conditions, the biomechanics, fabrication and fit can produce safe and effective outcomes for patients." Mead also noted that even professions with legitimate credentials are stepping outside of their knowledge and training and providing over-the-counter AFOs, when that may be an inadequate treatment solution.

Policy makers, payers, health professionals and the public should be aware that there are individuals that are providing AFO treatments that do not have the adequate knowledge or experience. It is important that patients be directed to knowledgeable health professionals for their required treatments.

Certified Orthotists CO(c) are authorized providers of custom AFO treatments by provincial governments and are eligible to submit claims for provincial health care reimbursement. No profession is more knowledgeable or highly trained in head-to-toe, custom orthotics than Certified Orthotists CO(c).

#### **About Orthotics Prosthetics Canada**

Orthotics Prosthetics Canada (OPC) is the national credentialing organization for the orthotic and prosthetic profession, which includes 450 certified clinicians and 150 registered technicians. OPC's role is to protect the public and advance the profession through quality standards of practice, professional credentialing, continued education, advocacy, and regulation. Certified Orthotists CO(c) are a self-regulated profession and are bound to ethical conduct and accountable to an arm's length Professional Practice Sub-Committee.

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