



Special Article:

How to choose your Prosthetist or Orthotist by Alan Lett, CPO

Choosing an Orthotist or Prosthetist is a critical decision. This person will be a key member of your rehabilitation team and work closely with your other healthcare providers. What's more, he or she will work closely with you. So it's very important to choose a practitioner who you feel is not only professionally qualified to meet your needs, but with whom you feel personally comfortable. After all, your relationship will last a long time—in some cases, a lifetime.

Keep in mind that:

- The choice of a practitioner is yours;
- Experience and training are important;
- You should feel comfortable with your provider.

About Orthotists and Prosthetists

Most people have no idea what orthotists and prosthetists do, so don't worry if you're among that group. It's easy enough to explain.

An **orthotist** is a healthcare professional who makes and fits devices (orthoses) for people who have weakened joints or muscles. The causes, for instance, can be disease, injury, or congenital disorder. Splints and braces are examples of orthoses.

A **prosthesist** is a healthcare professional who designs and fits devices (prostheses) for those who have lost limbs due to disease, traumatic injury, or congenital disorder. Artificial arms and legs are examples of prostheses.

Making your choice

We all seek recommendations when looking for new providers, whether it's a healthcare provider or someone to watch your home. So, even though your physician or therapist may have given you a recommendation for an orthotist or prosthesist, the choice really is yours.

Make an informed decision. Ask why they are making a recommendation for a specific facility or practitioner. And take advantage of the free searchable database of certified practitioners and accredited facilities at ABCop.org.

Assessing experience and training

Orthotists & Prosthetists are allied health professionals, not doctors. Therefore, it's very important to make sure your practitioner is qualified. To protect yourself, look for certificates from one of two credentialing organizations:

- The American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc. (ABC), or;
- The Board for Orthotist/Prosthetist Certification (BOC).

Those credentialed by one of these two organizations have met the profession's most rigorous standards through intensive training, including undergraduate work and apprenticeships. In addition, they are bound to ethical standards which make them accountable to you, your physician, and the profession. And, all certified practitioners are required to continue to add to their knowledge base through continuing education, seminars, periodicals, and, of course, the skill that comes from experience.

Feeling Comfortable with your Provider

There's a good chance that you will develop a long-term relationship with your provider and facility. It's a good idea to tour the facility, meet the staff, and have an introductory conversation with the practitioner. Here's an example of the kinds of things you might look for:

Provider

- Is the provider certified?
- How much experience has he or she had?
- Has the practitioner worked with patients with the same type of amputation or injury as yours?
- How will the provider approach your situation?
- How does he or she address complaints and problems?

Facility

- Is the facility conveniently located?
- Do the hours work with your schedule?
- Has the facility itself been accredited within ABC's stringent quality guidelines?

- Do your physician and insurance providers have a relationship with this provider?
- Does the facility offer help with paperwork?
- Do you feel comfortable with the staff, their responsibilities and their credentials?

It's also a good idea to talk to friends or family that may have had experience with the facility and the staff. This kind of insight can help you determine whether the practitioner, the facility, and the staff are the right choice for your individual needs and goals. Here is an example of the kinds of things you might ask:

Patients

- Did you like the staff?
- Can you give me an example of something the staff did that you thought was extraordinary?
- Was there ever a time when you wished more could have been done?
- Could you talk to the practitioner?
- Did they do a good job listening to your needs and goals?
- How did you like the facility?
- Did you have problems with your device? How did they approach the situation?

In Conclusion

Depending on your needs you might be spending a good deal of time with your orthotist or prosthetist and their staff. It's important to feel good about your decision. Take your time and do the research—you'll be glad you did. This relationship will be vital to the success of your experience and, ultimately, to an improved quality of life.