



American Orthotic & Prosthetic Association

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**AOPA In Advance SmartBrief**  
***Breaking News***  
**June 28, 2018**

**AOPA Headlines:**

**[DME MACs Retire Draft LCD and Policy Article for Lower Limb Prostheses](#)**

**[CMS' Lower Limb Prostheses Interagency Workgroup Releases a Consensus Statement](#)**  
**[New Medicare ID Cards Update](#)**

**[CMS Issues Instructions for DME MACs: Require O&P Documentation as Part of Medical Record](#)**

**[Proposal Deadline June 30<sup>th</sup> for Back Bracing and Osteoarthritis Bracing \(Knee\)](#)**

**[2018 Operating Performance Survey Open – Deadline June 28<sup>th</sup>](#)**

**[DME MACs Announce the Retirement of the Dear Physician Letter for Artificial Limbs](#)**

**[Additional TPE Program Results Reported by Noridian](#)**

**[Attend the St. Louis Coding & Billing Seminar July 23-24](#)**

**[Exhibit at the AOPA National Assembly – Sept. 26-29 in Vancouver, Canada](#)**

**[Upcoming Events](#)**

**DME MACs Retire Draft LCD and Policy Article for Lower Limb Prostheses**

Last week AOPA reported that the report of the Inter Agency Workgroup that was formed to provide a consensus statement to inform Medicare coverage of lower limb prostheses had been published. As part of the consensus statement, the Inter Agency Workgroup recommended, and CMS concurred, that the draft LCD and Policy Article for Lower Limb Prostheses, that was initially released on July 16, 2015, should be removed from the DME MAC websites and that the current LCD and Policy Article should remain in force for the immediate future.

On June 21, 2018, the DME MACs released a joint publication announcing the retirement of both the draft LCD and Policy Article. AOPA is continuing to evaluate the full consensus statement of the Inter Agency Workgroup and will provide comments in the near future.

The announcement of the draft LCD and Policy Article may be viewed by [clicking here](#).

Questions regarding this issue may be directed to Joe McTernan at [jmcternan@AOPAnet.org](mailto:jmcternan@AOPAnet.org) or Devon Bernard at [dbernard@AOPAnet.org](mailto:dbernard@AOPAnet.org).

## CMS' Lower Limb Prostheses Interagency Workgroup Releases a Consensus Statement

In 2016 the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) convened the Lower Limb Prostheses Interagency Workgroup in response to the comments received in regard to the 2015 Draft Local Coverage Determination (LCD) for Lower Limb Prostheses. The Workgroup's purpose was to "develop a consensus statement that informs Medicare policy by reviewing the available clinical evidence that defines best practices in the care of beneficiaries who require lower limb prostheses." The Workgroup has completed their review and released a consensus statement outlining their findings and suggestions.

Based on the findings and recommendations of the Workgroup CMS is taking the following immediate actions:

- Instructing the Durable Medical Equipment Medicare Administrative Contractors (DME MACs) to remove the Draft LCD
- Instructing the DME MACs that coverage for lower limb prostheses will remain under the current LCD, with no changes
- Future LCD changes must follow procedures set forth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act
- Considering creating a National Coverage Determination (NCD) to evaluate the use of microprocessor knees (MPK) in those individuals utilizing their prostheses as a limited community ambulator (K2 functional level)

The removal of the Draft LCD has been an aim of AOPA and its lobbying efforts, since it was introduced in 2015, and the official directions from CMS to remove it is a major victory. AOPA is currently reviewing the full findings of the Workgroup and the consensus document, and there are some areas/conclusions where AOPA will likely disagree and wish to provide additional comments. For example, it appears that the consensus document may have been written before the enactment in February, 2018 of Section 50402 of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 which recognizes the legitimacy of orthotist's and prosthetist's notes in the medical record for the justification of medical necessity. Even in light of the [recent letter from the CMS Deputy Administrator & Director of Program Integrity](#) instructing the implementation of Section 50402, CMS has yet to revise the Program Integrity Manual to reflect the directions from the Deputy Director, the head of CMS' own Program Integrity Center, and the current status of the prosthetist's notes continues to be misstated.

In addition the recommendation that the potential for MPK devices for K2- limited community ambulators- be done by a NCD is an important step forward as it represent CMS taking back this authority from the DME MACs. LCDs are the province of the DME MACs, while a NCD is a strict ***Federal Register*** CMS-driven rulemaking process. CMS has consistently said that the only way they could take this matter out of the authority of the DME MACs would be to invoke a NCD. AOPA will also be submitting comments on the proposed NCD and potential for microprocessor knees to be used by K2 -limited community- ambulators in accordance with established guidelines.

[Click here to access the document.](#) Then click to go to the Lower Limb Prosthetic Workgroup Consensus Document link.

AOPA will keep you posted about any additional actions taken as a result of the Workgroup's final findings. Questions? Contact Joe McTernan at [jmcternan@AOPAnet.org](mailto:jmcternan@AOPAnet.org) or Devon Bernard at [dbernard@AOPAnet.org](mailto:dbernard@AOPAnet.org).

## New Medicare ID Cards Update

The new Medicare ID cards with a Medicare Beneficiary Identifier (MBI), instead of the current Health Insurance Claim Number (HICN), are now being mailed to beneficiaries in Alaska, California, Oregon, Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. The new Medicare ID cards will continue to be sent to people who are newly enrolled with Medicare and beneficiaries in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Once beneficiaries with Medicare receive their new MBI cards, they may start using them right away. You may use either the HCIN or MBI through December 31, 2019. To verify if your patient's have received a new card you may use the MBI look up tools on your DME MAC's website.

### **CMS Issues Instructions for DME MACs to Immediately Implement Provisions that Require the Recognition of Orthotist and Prosthetist Clinical Documentation as Part of the Medical Record**

AOPA and its lobbying team have been pressing CMS from all levels, most recently, including consultation with Trump Administration officials at the Office of Management and Budget, to formally implement the provisions of Section 50402 of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-123) as it related to the prosthetist's and orthotist's clinical notes. AOPA was encouraged by the DME MAC notification 2-3 weeks ago where the DME MAC Medical Directors announced that they were 'retiring' the August 2011 "Dear Physician" letter on Lower Limb Prosthetics.

AOPA would like to share a recent letter from Alec Alexander, CMS' Director of Program Integrity which indicates that CMS "has issued instruction to the Durable Medical Equipment (DME) Medicare Administrative Contractors (MAC) to implement Section 50402 immediately." Section 50402 states:

*“(5) DOCUMENTATION CREATED BY  
17 ORTHOTISTS AND PROSTHETISTS.—For purposes of  
18 determining the reasonableness and medical neces-  
19 sity of orthotics and prosthetics, documentation cre-  
20 ated by an orthotist or prosthetist shall be consid-  
21 ered part of the individual's medical record to sup-  
22 port documentation created by eligible professionals  
23 described in section 1848(k)(3)(B).”.*

Mr. Alexander's letter is a clear assertion of CMS' commitment to acknowledge immediate implementation of the new statutory provisions in Section 50402, accepting the orthotist and prosthetist clinical notes as part of the individual's medical record as to "determining the

reasonableness and medical necessity of orthotics and prosthetics” e.g., functional levels, identification of broken, damaged parts and their repair, and identifying components in a category included in a physician approved detailed written order. We also suggest that AOPA members consider including a copy of the letter with all claims they file.

AOPA will continue to keep you informed of any developments in this important area.

[Click here to view the letter from Mr. Alexander.](#)

To view the DME MAC announcement of the retirement of the Dear Physician letter for lower limb prostheses, [click here.](#)

### **Proposal Deadline Extended for Back Bracing and Osteoarthritis Bracing (Knee)**

AOPA, under the auspices of its Orthotics 2020 program, circulated a request for proposals early in 2018 relating to 5 subject areas for original orthotic papers, with the original deadline for receipt of applications by April 30, 2018. Proposals have been received in all five of those categories. This notification is to announce a **re-opening of the opportunity to submit grant applications/extension of the deadline for applications in just two of those topic areas:**

- (1) Back bracing; and
- (2) Osteoarthritis bracing (knee).

AOPA will now be accepting applications for grants in those two areas, text of the two RFPs are available [here](#), provided that they are received by no later than **June 30, 2018 at 11:59 pm.**

All grant applications that were previously submitted in these two categories will continue to be included in the pool of applications to be evaluated and considered. In all other respects, except for this extended deadline date, all terms stated in these two original RFPs remain intact and in effect.

Please review closely the terms of the RFPs. One problem we have noticed with responses is that there were multiple scoliosis applications/research protocols submitted under the RFP for back bracing. The category of back bracing is neither written nor intended to solicit submissions related to scoliosis. There may come a time when we will be looking for scoliosis papers, but this is NOT that time, so please do not commit your valuable time and energies to submitting scoliosis proposals in response to this back bracing RFP.

Osteoarthritis bracing (knee) and back bracing are two very important and primary categories in the orthotics profession. We have intentionally expanded the publication/notification /outreach to a broader audience of potential investigators toward submission of proposals in these two areas. We will encourage and will welcome all high quality submissions under these two categories, which are in accordance with the terms of the two RFPs.

View the RFPs online [here](#) or request copies via email [info@AOPAnet.org](mailto:info@AOPAnet.org).

## 2018 Operating Performance Survey Open – Deadline June 28th



Forward thinking O&P managers are eager to participate in the 2018 Operating Performance Survey – the largest benchmarking survey for O&P. Participation in the survey is free to AOPA patient care facility members.

Each survey participant receives a customized company report - a scorecard on how your O&P facility's operating performance compares with industry leaders, and other facilities of similar size and geographic location.

Jeff Brandt, CPO, AOPA Board member and the new chair of the Operating Performance Survey Committee stresses that "Industry collaboration and data are key to operating our practices into the future." This valuable information can be used in discussions on company processes and how each employee contributes to staff productivity, profitability, and more. From there, practices can be modified and financial performance improved.

To receive your company's Operating Performance Survey company report, you'll need to complete the survey, which is open May 14 until June 28<sup>th</sup>. It's FREE for AOPA members. Go to [www.aopa-survey.com](http://www.aopa-survey.com) to fill out the survey online or call 571-431-0810 for more information.

## DME MACs Announce the Retirement of the Dear Physician Letter for Artificial Limbs

Recently, each of the four DME MAC contractors has published a revised version of the Dear Physician letter regarding artificial limbs. The revised version of the letter states that the Dear Physician letter is being retired due to pending guidance from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) on potential program changes that may be necessary to implement the recently passed legislation that requires recognition of O&P practitioner notes as part of the patient's medical record.

The Dear Physician letter for artificial limbs, originally published in August, 2011, fundamentally changed how Medicare claims for artificial limbs were processed. Prior to the 2011 Prosthetic Dear Physician letter, practitioner notes were generally accepted as being valuable when making claim payment decisions. The Dear Physician letter made it clear that for Medicare purposes, "it is the treating physician's records, not those of the prosthetist's, which are used to justify payment." This statement, and the overall tone of the Dear Physician letter lead to years of frustration where the clinical notes of qualified, educated, certified, and often licensed prosthetists, were simply ignored during the claim review process. This exclusion of valuable clinical information led to higher claim denial rates and unacceptable delays in the appeal process.

With the February, 2018 passage of legislation that now requires documentation created by orthotists and prosthetists to be considered part of the patient's medical record for medical review purposes, the statement quoted above and other parts of the Dear Physician letter are no longer consistent with the law. The DME MACs have acknowledged this and have decided to retire the 2011 Dear Physician letter for artificial limbs until they receive further guidance from CMS.

While the retirement of the Dear Physician letter does not mean that the DME MACs will no longer require physician documentation to support claims for artificial limbs, it is a clear indication that they acknowledge and understand that the provisions of the original Dear Physician letter are no

longer consistent with the law and therefore can no longer be used as the sole justification for denying a Medicare claim. It also indicates that the diligent AOPA efforts to convince CMS to provide guidance on this issue to their DME MAC contractors. While AOPA does not know what that eventual guidance will be, it is clear that CMS is aware of the legislation and intends to provide guidance to the DME MACs regarding the role of O&P practitioner notes in the medical review process.

[View a sample of one of the Dear Physician letters indicating its retirement.](#)

### **Additional TPE Program Results Reported by Noridian**

Earlier this month, AOPA provided a summary on the first report of results of Target, Probe, and Educate (TPE) audits by [Noridian Healthcare Solutions](#), the Jurisdiction D DME MAC contractor.

Since AOPA's initial report which was limited to TPE results for "walking boot" orthoses, Noridian has published additional results for knee orthoses, spinal orthoses, and off the shelf diabetic shoes.

The newly published results by Noridian continue to show significant reductions in improper payment rates than were previously reported through the previous audit process which included an initial probe review followed by widespread pre-payment review.

As previously reported, the improper claim payment rate has dropped to 19% for walking boot style AFOs. New reports published by Jurisdiction D show that TPE audits for spinal orthosis showed a significant improvement with an improper claim payment rate of 34%. The improper payment rate for off the shelf diabetic shoes has been reduced to only 19%, a tremendous improvement over the almost 100% error rate during probe/widespread review audits.

Unfortunately, the results from the TPE audits for select knee orthosis codes has not improved as much as some of the other areas subject to TPE. While Noridian reported some improvement with an improper payment rate of 77%, the improper payment rate remains significantly higher than the other services selected for TPE review. Common errors reported by Noridian for the knee orthosis review included documentation that does not support coverage criteria, incomplete or missing detailed written order, documentation does not support custom fitted criteria, and failure to respond to the request for documentation.

In addition to reporting the results of the initial audits performed under the TPE program, the DME MACs have just released a "Dear Physician" letter for knee orthoses that is designed to educate referral sources about what documentation must exist in their medical records in order to support your claim for a knee orthosis. AOPA has reviewed the Dear Physician letter and believes it is consistent with existing LCD and Policy requirements for Medicare coverage of knee orthoses.

The TPE program is designed to provide up to 3 rounds of audits with personalized provider education after each round that is designed to address the specific reasons for claim denial. While there is clearly a need for improvement in documentation practices for knee orthoses, in general, the results published by Noridian are generally encouraging. AOPA will continue to monitor the DME MAC websites for additional results from the TPE program.

[View the TPE Report](#)



[View the Physician letter](#)

**Attend the St. Louis Coding & Billing Seminar July 23-24**

***When: July 23-24  
Location: The Westin St. Louis  
811 Spruce Street  
St. Louis, MO 63102***

AOPA experts provide the most up-to-date information to help O&P Practitioners and office billing staff learn how to code complex devices, including repairs and adjustments, through interactive discussions with AOPA experts, your colleagues, and much more. Meant for both practitioners and office staff, this advanced two-day event will feature breakout sessions for these two groups, to ensure concentration on material appropriate to each group.

At this seminar you will:

- Receive up-to-date information on Prior Authorization and other Hot Topics
- Ensure your Proof of Delivery meets Medicare Requirements
- Learn how to assess risk areas in your practice
- Learn successful appeal strategies and hints to avoid claim denials
- Practice coding complex devices, including repairs and adjustment
- Attend break-out sessions for practitioners and office staff
- Earn 14 CEs



**Register Now**

**Exhibit at the AOPA National Assembly – Sept. 26-29 in Vancouver, Canada**



AOPA is currently accepting exhibit applications for the 2018 AOPA National Assembly which is to be held September 26-29, 2018 in beautiful Vancouver, Canada. Now is your chance to sign up and showcase your products at the largest O&P tradeshow in the Western Hemisphere. This world-wide convention opportunity features 4 days of high-level networking, exhibits, the latest techniques in O&P treatment, and the finest industry specific business and clinical training programs. We hope you make plans to join us.

**Exhibiting at this important event will give you the opportunity to:**

- Build your customer base and increase sales by meeting with Facility Owners and decision-making practitioners.
- Experience face-to-face time with existing customers to answer questions and build new relationships.
- Enjoy sponsored networking opportunities, including an opening welcome reception in the exhibit hall.
- Take advantage of fun traffic-building opportunities.

- Take advantage of education sessions to learn what’s happening with U.S. health care reform, Medicare, and other regulatory agencies that affect the success of your products.
- Increase visibility for your company/organization in a targeted market.
- Host a Manufacturer’s Workshop and/or Product Preview Theater presentation.
- Speak to AOPA coding experts to learn what’s happening with U.S. government sponsored healthcare programs.
- Increase your exposure through a wide variety of advertising and sponsorship opportunities.
- Hear from top-researchers and clinicians to learn what products and support is needed from manufacturers.
- Participate in key education programs and plenary sessions.
- Benefit from global exposure.
- Much more!

[Click here to sign up](#) today to exhibit at the 2018 AOPA National Assembly. Questions? Contact Kelly O’Neill at [kelly.oneill@AOPAnet.org](mailto:kelly.oneill@AOPAnet.org) or call (571) 431-0852.



Join your colleagues at the Vancouver West Convention Center, Vancouver, BC, Canada for AOPA's 101st Assembly! Enjoy the best in business education and advanced clinical programming, the largest O&P exhibit hall, networking with the most influential people in the profession, must attend events, and 30+ CE credits. [Register and learn more here.](#)

<b>Upcoming AOPA Events</b>
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| July 11, 2018    | <i>Administrative Documentation: Always v. Sometimes</i><br>AOPA Webinar<br><a href="#">Learn more and register here</a> |
| July 23-24, 2018 | Coding & Billing Seminar<br>St. Louis, MO<br><a href="#">Learn more and register here</a>                                |
| August 8, 2018   | <i>Outcomes &amp; Patient Satisfaction Surveys</i><br>AOPA Webinar<br><a href="#">Learn more and register here</a>       |