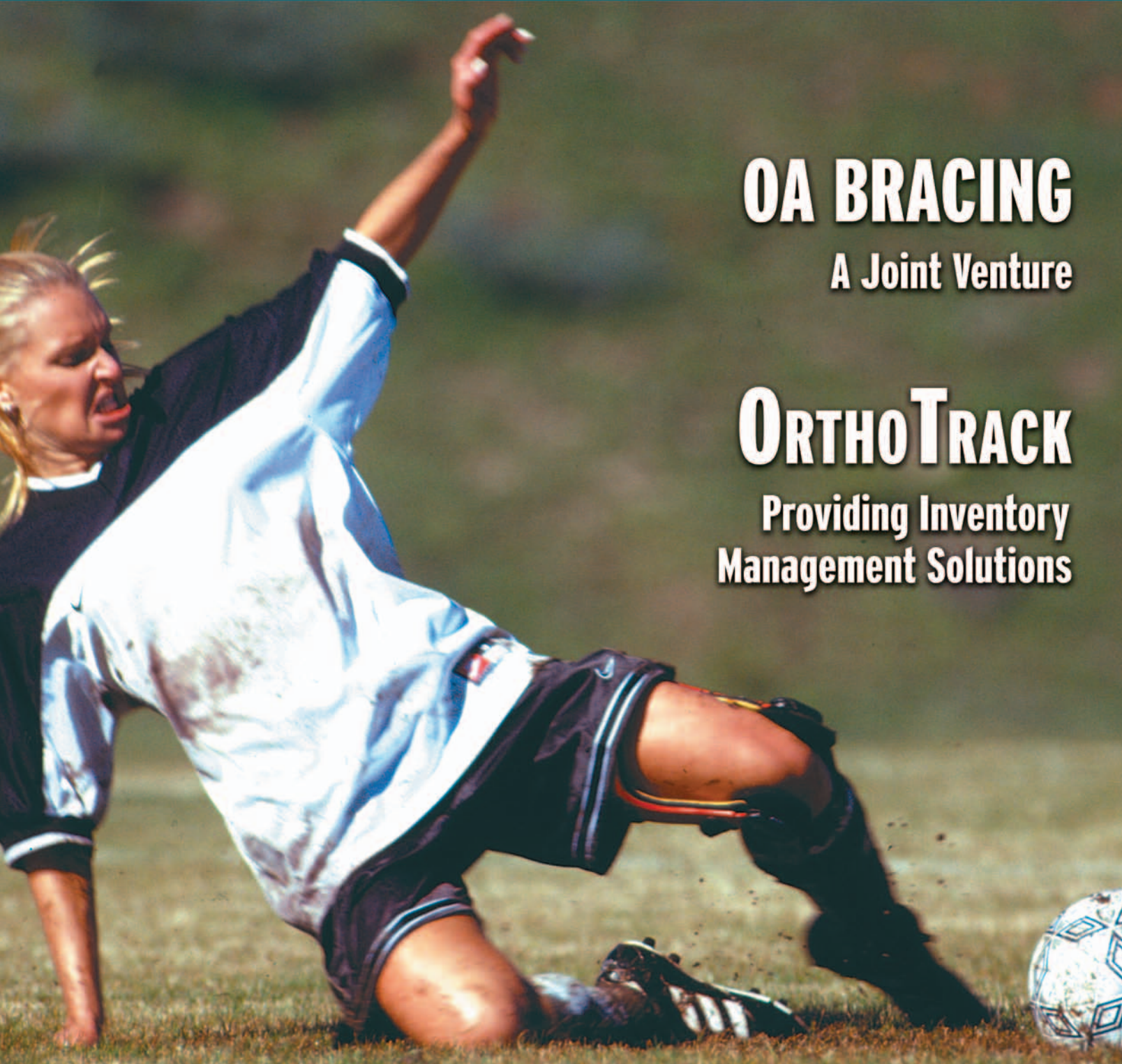


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The Med Supply Line is an inside look at how orthopedic-related products are making a positive difference in the delivery of quality orthopedic care. This bi-annual publication, produced by ACO Med Supply, is designed to educate and inform orthopedic surgeons, practice administrators, purchasing departments, physical therapists, and athletic trainers. The information contained in this publication is not intended to replace a physician's professional consultation and assessment. Please consult your physician on matters related to your personal health.

Opening Remarks

As busy as we are today meeting the needs of our patients and the demands of managing our practice, it is always a welcome change when a vendor makes life easier — even better. One of our best partners is ACO Med Supply. They have met our needs, exceeded our expectations, and worked collaboratively with our large physician specialty practice. I am honored to provide the keynote message for this inaugural issue of ACO's *The Med Supply Line*.

Product availability, price, and service are the bedrock of a successful vendor relationship. But an extra measure of commitment by the vendor to understand customer operations, profitability, and shareholder returns improves the purchasing agreement and allows both parties to profit from the relationship. ACO Med Supply has made just such a commitment to all its customers; we see it everyday in our relationship.

As a diversified medical supply house and distributor of internationally recognized DonJoy bracing and support products, ACO Med Supply is uniquely positioned to meet the high economic, quality, and service standards of orthopedic specialty practices.

This magazine is a great example of the company's effort to tell its story and remind the health care community of some of the best reasons to look to ACO Med Supply as a valued business partner.

Sincerely,



James L. Perkins, MHA, CMPE
Administrator, West End Orthopaedic Clinic
Richmond, Virginia

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Joint Venture

OA Braces Apply Support Where It's Needed By Diane M. Calabrese

Hinges simplify life. Instead of prying open a door each time we want to enter and exit, we count on its swinging motion. But when hinges eventually deteriorate, they require restoration or replacement.

So it is with our joints, the in-body hinges that allow us to walk, run, and throw with great fluidity. With so much activity packed into a lifetime, joints are naturally well cushioned with cartilage to withstand repeated use.

Yet, an increased lifespan puts cartilage to the test. When cartilage begins to lose its capacity to cushion, the bone surfaces that were once protected at the joint begin to rub against each other. The result is as painful as it sounds.

Pain is not the only problem associated with osteoarthritis (OA), a progressive deterioration of cartilage and bone. Swelling can occur, and the ability to move with ease decreases.

OA affects 21 million Americans. The market for OA braces is growing at more than 10 percent per year. The availability of OA bracing is one part of an integrated approach to reduce the effects of OA on individuals and the population as a whole. Although some OA cases are caused by repetitive use in athletes, many are linked to aging. Consequently, as more adults live longer and are more active, the incidence of OA will continue to rise.

A Little Goes a Long Way

It's possible to replace joints, and pain-relief medications are available. But if a noninvasive method can improve mobility, it is generally the first option physicians choose.

In fact, Alonzo Myers, MD, Orthopedic Surgeon at the Lewis-Gale Clinic in Salem, Virginia, selected the least invasive option for himself — a knee brace. "I use a DonJoy off-loader brace when I play golf," explains Dr. Myers.

According to Dr. Myers, an orthopedist can help a patient decide if a brace will help. His brace redistributes weight so the portion of his knee joint most affected by OA does not hold a disproportionate amount of the load.

The angularity of uneven cartilage wear can exacerbate pain by pushing more load toward the part of the knee least able to tolerate it. In some cases, explains Dr. Myers, individuals who have sustained a ligament injury benefit from a knee brace, as further injury is prevented by the supportive properties of the brace.

Dr. Myers has recommended braces to patients for at least 10 years but more so during the last four years, as brace technology has improved. Over the last decade, braces have become lighter and less conspicuous.

Added Benefits

Dr. Myers sees braces as a beneficial option for many patients. "With increasing concerns over use of anti-inflammatory medicines, this is a good alternative," he explains, "as it is in my case."

With angular degeneration of cartilage, an individual's effort to reduce pain by using a compensating gait can actually put him or her at greater risk for a fall. With the stabilizing effect of many DonJoy braces, fall prevention is often another advantage for patients who utilize a brace. "To some extent, the stabilizing effect of the brace probably slows the progress of OA," Dr. Myers explains.

A Good Start

To give patients the best opportunity for success with a brace, careful evaluation and patient education are musts, says Jim Reeks, a representative for ACO Med Supply. Beyond that, says Reeks, working to find a brace that is a correct match for the patient requires attention to activity level,

lifestyle, body type, age, and severity of disease progression.

In addition, knee-replacement surgery is not an option for many heart patients, Reeks explains. The sales representatives at ACO Med Supply will work closely with the physician or orthotist in understanding the patient's medical condition, special needs, and activity level.


DonJoy is so confident with the success of their OA bracing that they have instituted a "Test Drive Program," which states, "If any patient is not 100% satisfied after receiving a DonJoy OA product, they may return the brace for full credit or refund within 30 days." ■

If your patient's quality of life hinges on an OA product, look to DonJoy for your bracing solution. To review DonJoy's complete line of OA bracing, visit their Web site at www.donjoy/arthritis.com.




The market for OA braces is growing at more than 10 percent per year.

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ACO's corporate headquarters in Charlotte

A Decade of Excellence

Client-Focused Business Ethic Puts Med Supply Company on Top

By Mali R. Schantz-Feld

ACO Med Supply opened as an orthopedic specialty distributor in Charlotte, North Carolina, in June 1995 with a 2,500-square-foot facility, two employees, and nine sales representatives covering three states. The firm initially represented three orthopedic lines: DonJoy Orthopedics, Procure, and Tecnol.

Stuart Ross, ACO Principal and Founder, decided to expand into full-line distribution of medical-surgical products, focusing on the needs of orthopedic practices. Approximately a year and a half after opening, ACO doubled the size of its warehouse.

ACO Med Supply has focused on the business aspect of the medical practice so the clinical staff can concentrate on their patients. Customers soon recognized how ACO's knowledge of their business needs could maximize their office efficiency; the result was continued expansion. A year later, another move heralded a 12,800-

square-foot warehouse. The most recent expansion in August 2004 doubled its current configuration to 26,000 square feet, making it one of the largest distribution centers for orthopedic products in the Southeast.

"We continue to focus on growth within the Carolinas and Virginia, adding personnel and valuable customers," says Ross, who notes the firm is expanding in the Southeast as far as Florida, Georgia, and Alabama.

Service and Personal Attention

ACO's success stems from the firm's dedication to "the personal touch" and superior customer service. According to Ross, "Most full-line medical-surgical distributors don't focus on orthopedics because of the technical and product expertise required, along with the significant commitment to orthopedic inventory."

The dedication to fulfilling customer requests has enabled the firm to grow from a distributorship of three medical-equipment companies to more than 500 suppliers. ACO has evolved into a market leader in the four-state region encompassing North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and eastern Georgia, with 23 sales and service representatives.

To increase its product offering, ACO joined the ABCO division of National Distribution & Contracting, Inc. (NDC), the largest organization of independent medical, surgical, and dental supply distributors in the world. "We benefit from their help. Some of the benefits provided by ABCO include lower pricing, national contracting, and a private-label program," says Jimmy Gray, ACO Vice President. "ABCO has a large warehouse in Nashville that acts as an extension of our own."

“Physicians appreciate distributors that are smaller, more flexible, and able to meet their specific needs.”

— Stuart Ross,
ACO Principal and Founder

The attention to individual customer needs sets ACO apart from larger firms. Competition from large group purchasing organizations and integrated delivery networks does not daunt ACO's sales force, which concentrates on customizing plans to fit unique customer needs. ACO's philosophy reflects that notion: "ACO Med Supply is a privately held business, not a policy-driven conglomerate. We run the system, as opposed to the system running us."

The Extra Mile

Gray literally goes the extra mile to satisfy clients. "Our customers' needs are paramount," he says. He recalls when a customer requested a rush order on a piece of equipment in a city more than two hours away. "We put it in our car and met the sales rep half way," recalls Gray. "We ensured it was delivered that day because they were in a bind and needed it immediately. I can assure you that a large national distributor would not jump in his car and drive to his customer. He just can't."

At ACO, such instances are not isolated; they happen routinely. "Our customers have come to expect the extras; this sets us apart," says Gray. "In the United States, we

are privileged to have a great medical system. The physicians have more to say about what they are buying. They appreciate distributors that are smaller, more flexible, and able to meet their specific needs, while focusing on reducing costs in their product supply chain.”

Confronting Challenges in the Health Care Marketplace

Besides ensuring supplies are in stock, ACO keeps tabs on everyday office tasks. Ross asserts that with the evolution of a more sophisticated payer base, orthopedic practices are challenged to operate more profitably. Billing ancillary services takes time and manpower. “As costs for other parts of the business continue to rise, running a marginally profitable business doesn’t make sense,” says Ross.

Challenges such as third-party billing, stock-and-bill programs, as well as just-in-time inventory pushes make orthopedic practices turn to ACO for their office needs. “Because ACO is small and independently owned, we remain unencumbered by red tape to make changes and act quickly and decisively within our market,” says Ross.

As a DonJoy distributor, ACO offers several stock-and-bill programs to fit specific clinic needs. The OfficeCare program and the Med Direct program for smaller offices

address numerous stocking and billing issues, such as:

- (1) Streamlining office procedures and reducing overhead,
- (2) Removing financial losses associated with billing and reimbursement of softgoods,
- (3) Transferring the responsibility of inventory management to ACO and DonJoy,
- (4) Removing the capital investment tied up with durable medical equipment inventory on the shelf,
- (5) Reducing time spent with vendors in the clinic, and
- (6) Addressing compliance issues when patients are fitted at the point of care.

Currently, ACO has more OfficeCare customers than any other DonJoy distributor in the United States.

Vendor consolidation is another important aspect regarding efficiency, explains Ross. Too much time and energy are expended on managing and ordering supplies, as well as checking and stocking receivables. With the significant expense of generating an invoice, it is often costly to do business with numerous vendors. ACO’s relationship with more than 500 manufacturers makes vendor consolidation an easy transition.

In 2001, ACO began requiring its orthopedic-specialty representatives to receive board certification as orthotic

A National Sales Award

At this year’s DonJoy sales banquet, which welcomed 200 distributors and sales reps, ACO Med Supply and one of its representatives were honored with awards. Sales representative Greg Harmon, of Columbia, South Carolina, received the Pinnacle Award as the sales associate with the highest growth. ACO Med Supply won a Pinnacle Award as a product-growth champion distributorship. These awards recognize ACO’s continuing dedication to offering the highest quality customer service and variety of products to customers. ACO would like to thank its customers and sales associates for the company’s success.

fitters, which calls for many hours of field experience, formal training, and earning a required level of continuing education units (CEUs) annually (see “Fitting Credentials” sidebar). Orthopedic surgeons can feel comfortable that their patients are fitted and trained on brace functionality by certified professionals.

“Larger clinics have put us to the test to see if we can handle their business,” says Ross. “We have an understanding of brand value, pricing, and delivery. Large or small, each customer can count on the service and integrity that has made ACO Med Supply what it is today. We’re 10 years and growing, one account at a time.” ■

Fitting Credentials

The American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics (ABCOP) awards orthotic fitters with the credentials of ABC Registered Fitter-Orthotics (RFO) as an appropriate and meaningful recognition of professional competence. For eligibility, the candidate must have a certain amount of hours of orthotic-fitter experience, successfully complete an orthotic-fitter education program, and have an orthotic-fitter license issued by a state orthotic/prosthetic licensing board.

Candidates are also required to take continuing education units (CEUs) designed to maintain, develop, and increase the knowledge, skills, and professional relationships that registered fitters need to successfully provide services for the public. ACO requires all its orthopedic-specialty representatives to receive these ABC credentials.

For more information on credentialing, visit the ABC Web site at www.abcop.org.



Brace Yourself!

Innovative Technology Stabilizes Sprains and Prevents Recurrent Injuries

By Mali R. Schantz-Feld

Everyday, approximately 25,000 people sprain their ankles in the United States. The “old-fashioned” method of wrapping the injury with costly athletic tape is time consuming and can result in longer rehabilitation time and reinjury.

Athletes are turning to ankle braces to properly stabilize sprains and reduce recurrent ankle injuries. Physicians and patients have braced themselves for a new innovation in ankle support and the evolution of new products therein. The Velocity represents DonJoy’s new line of Rigid Ankle Braces. In March 2005, the DonJoy Velocity ankle brace garnered significant attention at its unveiling at the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons’ convention in Washington, D.C.

Innovative Technology

“This off-the-shelf ankle brace incorporates many features that one would expect from a custom ankle-foot orthosis,” says Russ Havranek, Senior Marketing Manager for athletic bracing at dj Orthopedics. “From footplate to calf cuff, the Velocity represents an evolution in DonJoy ankle-brace technology.”

Developed using R3 (Rapid-Rigid-Ratcheted) Technology, the Velocity prevents abnormal

ankle inversion, eversion, and rotation, while offset, bilateral hinges allow for natural, unrestricted dorsi-and-plantar flexion. While many rigid, hinged ankle braces are bulky and difficult to fit into shoes, the Velocity is low profile and lightweight.

“Some braces are universally sized, but this is the only brace that comes in modular sizes, providing a better fit.”

— Russ Havranek,
Senior Marketing Manager, dj Orthopedics

“Some braces are universally sized, but this is the only brace that comes in modular sizes, providing a better fit,” says Havranek. He adds that the three footplate and two calf cuff sizes can be mixed and matched to accommodate an individual patient’s anatomy — further, this product includes a left and right model, not just a universal model as with many competitors.

The footplate is anatomically contoured and sized to mitigate foot slippage and is heat moldable for customization to each patient’s foot, matching insoles, or orthoses, Havranek says. “The Velocity’s unique features and technologies really set it apart from other braces,” he notes.

The Velocity design provides support to the calcaneus and prevents extremes of inversion and eversion, the culprits of traditional ankle sprains. Selecting the appropriate brace is a simple choice, which takes into consideration the amount of ankle protection and support required as well as the patient’s or athlete’s activity level.

Customizable by Design

Three different versions of the Velocity brace are available, each with the same rigid components but different softgoods that afford various support levels.

The Velocity LS (light support) is the lowest profile and lightest weight version.

The Velocity MS (moderate support) features SpeedWrap technology for secured joint compression. The Velocity LS and MS versions are ideal for patients and athletes who want to quickly return to daily living activities and noncontact sports.

The Velocity ES (extra support) also features SpeedWrap and incorporates an outer shell to capture the calcaneus and an Achilles pad for added comfort and support. The Velocity ES version is ideal for patients and athletes who want to quickly return to engaging in noncontact and contact sports such as basketball, volleyball, and soccer.

The Velocity is easy to apply and remove. The SpeedWrap technology incorporates low-profile, no-tie laces with strap ends readily attachable to each other or directly to the outer shell. The adjustable tongue design on the Velocity MS and ES versions ensures comfort, fit, and proper alignment. The SpeedWrap is a low-profile option for bracing and was well received by patients.

Superior Support

“The brace’s fully rigid circumferential calf cuff offers superior tibia/fibula compression for high ankle sprains and prevents abnormal inversion and eversion,” says Havranek. The Velocity’s footplate is also designed with unique posterior wings that provide calcaneus support.

For patients who wear orthoses, they can place the Velocity footplate on top of the orthotic so the ankle joint properly aligns with the brace’s bilateral hinges. If the contour of the brace does not match or sit flush on the orthotic, the footplate is heat molded and/or trimmed.

For the color-conscious sports enthusiast, the brace is available in either black or



Velocity. Born to run. Fast.

white and has a customizable nametag system for easy owner identification.

Bracing Your Patients

The Velocity was field tested by many collegiate and professional athletes and was found to provide superior support to patients recovering from high ankle sprains or lateral instability. Use of the Velocity ankle orthosis for prophylactic applications as noted by Rod Walters, Head Athletic Trainer for the University of South Carolina, is shown to reduce the cost of standard taping applications by more than 40 percent.

Based on the reduction of cost per athlete, the elimination of staff time for taping applications, and the higher level of support and stability provided by the Velocity, this is certainly the wave of the future. The Velocity is now a bracing option for sports medicine patients. Athletic trainers note the reduced cost of bracing versus taping on a daily basis over the course of a season — a savings close to 40 percent. ■

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Inventory Management Solutions

Web-Based System Provides Quick Tracking

By Mali R. Schantz-Feld

Some see the supply cabinet half full. Others see it half empty. That's a problem in a busy orthopedic practice, where time is scarce and proper supplies are vital. Orthopedic clinics can overcome inventory challenges and save time and money with a little help from OrthoTrack.

According to inventory management specialists, who build and market Web-based solutions for businesses, many health care organizations are struggling to balance inventory challenges. High order fill rates, high inventory turns, inventory shrink, and obsolescence drain a practice's profits.

ACO Med Supply understands the multiple tasks involved in a successful medical practice. For patients to receive optimal care, the office must have the ability to access information quickly and efficiently handle supply issues. In the past two years, ACO and DonJoy have researched inventory management software applications to address the specific needs of orthopedic clinics.

As an orthopedic and medical-surgical products distributor, ACO shares the frustrations and realizes the value of managing the durable medical equipment (DME) inventory. Among its services, ACO and DonJoy now offer the OrthoTrack solution for managing the myriad of products in an orthopedic environment.

"OrthoTrack is a Web-based tool that is easy to support and is maintained by our company," says OrthoTrack Managing Director Steve Britt.

Works Like a Charm

Inventory poses a dilemma. Stockpiling too many items on the shelf is costly, but too few products on hand can affect patient care. Supplies are often ordered, stocked, and used by several staff members, complicating coordination. Within the clinical environment, supplies may require tracking between multiple locations, various supply closets, and individual vendors.

To maintain proper quantities, OrthoTrack establishes and maintains par levels, tracks insurance billable products, and integrates the ordering function into the accounting process.

The system tracks inventory in a variety of ways — by procedure, doctor, and patient, notes Britt. The program does not allow reimbursable items to "fall between the cracks." Certain supplies, such as wrist braces or walkers, are billable either to the insurance or to the patient. Sometimes DME products are issued to a patient without the patient or insurance company receiving a bill, or products are removed from the shelf and not replenished.

OrthoTrack establishes a simple way to quickly enter the information into the system. Scanning items avoids duplication and reduces paperwork.



OrthoTrack establishes a simple way to quickly enter the information into the system. Scanning items avoids duplication and reduces paperwork. Hand-held barcode scanners with built-in laser scanners are portable and durable. The system also helps eliminate stock-outs and has the capability to automatically restock the supplies.

"The system knows what's on hand," says Britt. "It maintains a perpetual inventory. Every time a supply is moved off the shelf, it's tracked."

All Systems Go

Many offices are reluctant to use a tracking system due to the implementation costs. For other inventory management systems, the purchase of new software and an updated computer system, as well as the costs of implementation, training, and evaluation, can dip into the practice's profits. Also, implementing a new office procedure requires evaluation and training for physicians, administrators, and staff who are already battling tight schedules, so learning a complicated new program can become more of a problem than a solution.

Since OrthoTrack is Web based, any computer that connects to the Internet can work with this user-friendly application. Computers require no updating, and a monthly subscription replaces large upfront costs. To maintain security, a password is required for system entry, and users can turn certain applications on and off for proprietary usage.

Information is kept in a manner that adheres to new privacy regulations as well. "The system supports HIPPA regulations while tracking patient data," says Britt. If supplies are low, an e-mail alert informs the proper office contact that it is time to replenish and provides the vendor contact information.

The system also provides a detailed spending analysis, tracks products to specific patients or procedures, and provides an audit trail for order monitoring, receiving, and paying for supplies.

Built to Order

ACO is one of the first distributors to understand the need to offer a spectrum of orthopedic products and a solution to manage the volume of specialized products required in the orthopedic environment. In this way, ACO acts as a partner and consultant in addressing product management needs in all aspects of inventory management. ■

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