

Medicare DME and you



Durable medical equipment and supplies — what you need to know.

By James C. Antos, DC

The chiropractic profession offers the lure of financial and personal rewards, and these have led some DCs to take unnecessary risks as they jump on the latest fads and trends. With anything new, it's important to understand how to proceed safely.

As a case in point, consider the emerging trend in chiropractic of becoming certified as a durable medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics, and supplies (DMEPOS) physician for Medicare.

As with most things, there are positives and negatives to this trend.

On the plus side

The following are some of the compelling reasons to become DMEPOS certified:

1. Enhance your clinical outcomes. *For example:* The use of lumbar braces can be highly effective in the overall clinical outcome for the patient.
2. DME supplies are commonly used and considered appropriate by all types of physicians in patient care.
3. Medicare will pay a certified supplier-doctor at a set fee schedule that is financially rewarding. Net profits per item can be as high as \$1,000 for a single lumbar brace.
4. You can become certified as a supplier-doctor without additional seminars or classroom studies.
5. The use of DME supplies is in line with the chiropractic philosophy. They are "naturally right."
6. Patients comply with the use of DME supplies in their care and treatment.
7. Patients appreciate the fact that Medicare DME will pay for the supplies.
8. For the chiropractor, practice finance enhancement occurs without selling or additional marketing.
9. The additional positive income can be the difference between a high-stress or low-stress practice.
10. You will appear more prestigious to patients and the healthcare community through the use of certified systems within Medicare. Essentially, you appear more professional and accepted.

Potential downsides

You may have worries or concerns about various negatives involved with Medicare DME such as the following:

1. Being certified means going through an application process that must be done with the appropriate government agency. Many chiropractors are leery of getting involved with a federal agency.
2. If you are non-compliant with the directives, you will be penalized.
3. The Medicare system is an adversary.
4. You may be scared of potential office audits and want to avoid them at all costs.

5. You suspect that you aren't able to be paid by Medicare DME and so getting certified must be impossible. You are only paid for giving adjustments and are afraid of doing something wrong.
6. Medical and osteopathic physicians will not agree with a chiropractor's use of DME products.

The reality

Now, here's a closer look at the potential negatives and the risks, and how you should approach them:

1. "I am scared of being involved with a government agency." All American citizens are under the legal authority of the government. Like it or not, you are exposed to scrutiny already. As long as you follow the rules you should have no fear. As a chiropractor, you also have rights in the eyes of the government. This includes becoming certified as a DME provider and being financially rewarded for providing appropriate care. Once you understand the process, you will find that it is actually safer and easier to provide DME services than it is to provide chiropractic care to patients.
2. "It is hard to be compliant in Medicare DME." Being compliant with DME rules and regulations is simple. The key is to know what is expected. Nothing that is required is difficult to do. In fact, being Medicare DME-compliant is very straightforward.
3. "The Medicare system is hard to work with." On the contrary, the Medicare DME system is arguably one of the easiest agencies with which to work. Medicare DME is far easier to navigate than the provider side of the government Medicare system.
4. "Scared stiff of an audit." Audits can come in two forms. The first is a random audit. You are always at risk of this if you see any patient who is a Medicare enrollee at any time. The second is a certification audit. This does happen in some applications and is usually triggered by something in the application that signals a potential issue with the DME department. If this occurs, being prepared for the needs of the auditor is usually sufficient. Knowledge of the auditor's needs is the key here. You cannot imagine how good it feels knowing that you are doing things lawfully and correctly.
5. "Chiropractors cannot be DME providers." A chiropractor can not only be certified as a supplier-doctor, but has the right as an American to be certified. You are not excluded because you are a chiropractor. You can only be excluded if you do not apply to be certified.
6. "Medical doctors will not like this." Other healthcare professionals, 98 percent of the time, are very easy to work with. Involvement with Medicare DME can give you the appearance of being more mainstream and less controversial.

In ancient tribes and civilizations, and in chiropractic today, fear and superstition, combined with a lack of knowledge, always hold the individual and the society back.

Don't let fear and lack of knowledge restrain you from increasing your practice's stability. Assert your right as an American citizen to enjoy the benefits of being a Medicare DME provider.



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