Bastian, 49, who also had osteosarcoma as a teen and underwent a transfemoral amputation in 1989, remembers telling Martella, “This is crazy. Either we buy his place or we open our own.” The owner, however, didn’t want to sell, so Bastian and Martella opened Progressive O&P, which marks its 15-year anniversary this month.

Since its inception, the practice has grown to include two additional practitioners and, after much consideration, Martella and Bastian, president and vice president respectively, added another dimension to their practice in April: They hired a licensed clinical social worker, one of the first to work solely with an O&P practice in the Long Island, New York, area, according to Martella.

Melissa Antonucci, LCSW-R, with 18 years of experience in the field, joined the practice—the “R” designation means she has psychotherapy privileges.

It was a decision the owners considered carefully—given that the O&P profession is facing a more difficult time addressing a plethora of insurance queries as well as Recovery Audit Contractor (RAC) audits, and many O&P businesses are closing their doors because of the related financial burdens.

“We wanted to bring someone like Melissa on board and knew it would be another salary for us to consider,” says Martella.

Bastian agrees. “We were leery about it in the beginning because of the potential implications to our business.” Adding more staff doesn’t come without risk, the owners agree.

A Perfect Fit

Martella knew Antonucci from the North Shore/Long Island Jewish Health System, where she worked as a social worker and where Martella still goes regularly to help his patients as they prepare for the next steps after amputation surgery. Martella and Bastian both say they knew Antonucci would be a perfect fit for their facility given her background in psychology and social work. Antonucci is an extension of Progressive O&P’s philosophy toward its patients and practice, the owners say.

“She had the right skillset,” Martella says. “We felt her addition would be well worth it. She completes the team.”

Bastian adds, “Melissa lives by the code that her job is to carry the weight of the crisis for the people she helps.”

Antonucci’s extensive experience allows her to help clients...