Veteran-Specific Concerns

Women who have undergone traumatic amputations and are also veterans may have additional factors that complicate treatment due to their military experience. In general, female veterans are at greater risk for homelessness and unemployment than male veterans and are more likely to live alone, according to Randolph. Also highlighting issues faced by female veterans, the non-profit Society for Women’s Health Research (SWHR), based in Washington DC, testified before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies on March 26, 2012. The SWHR included information on differences in how men and women in the Armed Forces respond to traumatic events. For example, female veterans are more than twice as likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as are their male counterparts. Randolph notes, “It has been found that sexual assault is more likely to cause PTSD than any other event, and nearly one in five women veterans spanning all generations accessing VA care report that they have been a victim of military sexual trauma,” according to the SWHR.

Pregnancy Considerations

Special concerns for pregnant amputees include weight management and regular exercise, Randolph points out. Prosthetic alignment and abnormal wear of components should be checked regularly. She notes that women with amputations at the transfemoral level are most affected by pregnancy due to larger amounts of soft tissue present and adds that transfemoral amputees who are scheduled to give birth via cesarean section should have the incision made higher to prevent irritation by the socket brim.

Treatment Factors to Consider

Clinical and environmental factors affecting women who undergo amputation include the following, according to Randolph:

- Providers may need to offer enhanced communication to maximize encounter satisfaction.
- Women report a greater need for privacy, modesty, and sense of dignity during the evaluation process.
- Women often prefer a female prosthetist or orthotist.
- Women describe different rehabilitation goals.
- Women often prefer female peer visitors.
- Many women believe that “men don’t see this the same way women do.”

Prosthetists’ Goals

The Boston bombing survivors as well as other individuals with amputations, whether female or male, traumatic or elective, are adapting to new lives as amputees. As prosthetists, “Our main goals are proper fit, proper function, and use of proper components to get patients back to their functional lifestyle as fast as we can,” Martino says. “That helps their overall feeling about themselves—they’re up, they’re laughing again, they’re participating in their lives. The quicker we can make that happen, the better for all concerned.”

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Left: Sdoia uses the parallel bars to practice her gait using her new Ottobock Genium knee.

Above: Arthur Graham shows Sdoia an example of a silicone cover.

Photographs courtesy of Next Step Bionics & Prosthetics.