supplies of components and materials, it is difficult for many amputees to obtain a customized prosthesis. Another obstacle amputees also face is the difficulty of finding a productive job.

Needed: Recognition as O&P Professionals

Another problem, which requires the attention of health authorities, is that the orthotic and prosthetic practitioner is not recognized as a professional by the clinical team. His opinions and recommendations in respect to writing the prescription and prosthetic management are not accepted or recognized. Through my experience of more than 40 years in the profession, I know that there are highly qualified colleagues who have a passion for our profession. Unfortunately, the administrative authorities are still unwilling to recognize them as professionals, in spite of the fact that in many Latin American countries there are permanent schools for allied health professionals as part of the rehabilitation team. These schools are recognized by the Secretaries of Health and Higher Education.

Many practitioners' problems begin when they graduate from these schools. The Administrative Personnel Department classifies them as technicians, since they are employed in workshops. Although the government invests great sums of money training prosthetists, they classify them erroneously, and thus their salaries are smaller. Consequently, they just leave their jobs in favor of a better position, and prosthetic and orthotic services are undermined. In some Latin American countries, prosthetic and orthotic treatment is limited to only what is needed to satisfy the most urgent necessities. In rural areas and other places with limited access to services, simple devices are being created within the community with local materials.

Progress Despite Obstacles

It is worth mentioning that, despite the difficulties and obstacles that confront us, we are obtaining good results in certain aspects of prosthetic and orthotic service. The progress is related to the improvement of teaching and continuing education. Some of these educational opportunities are directed to practitioners, who with an adequate, minimum experience of five years, can enter the distance Graduate in Orthotics and Prosthetics program, graduating as a Category II technologist of the International Society for Prosthetics & Orthotics (ISPO). This program was instituted by the University Don Bosco and the cooperative German group GTZ in El Salvador, Central America, approximately three years ago. Other programs of continuing education and certification are being promoted by professional orthotic and prosthetic societies and associations in various Spanish-speaking countries.

Promoting Education

However, new schools should be founded, and existing schools should be promoted so that they operate each year, filled with new, young practitioners. An urgent need exists for the federal and state governments to focus economic funds on the education and high-level training of orthotists and prosthetists.

Standards of Care

Personally, I believe that the rehabilitation of the patient who requires orthotic and prosthetic assistance should adhere to similar standards, no matter in what part of the world the treatment takes place. This goal requires a movement toward uniformity of the educational and training norms and standards and resulting practitioner qualifications. Our idea is that all the orthotic and prosthetic practitioners in Latin America should obtain the same qualification as professionals. That's the way it should be.

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