

Clark can look back on productive, satisfying years of active participation in national O&P organizations in several capacities, including serving as a former president of the American Board for Certification in Orthotics, Prosthetics & Pedorthics (ABC), a former regional vice president of the American Orthotic & Prosthetic Association (AOPA), and a former board member of the American Academy of Orthotists and Prosthetists (the Academy). He also served as a volunteer in other roles for all of these organizations.

In 2003, the Academy honored Clark with the Distinguished Practitioner Award.

Clark is a lifetime member of the Amputee Coalition, and he and his wife Susan serve on the Covenant Medical Center Foundation Board in Waterloo.

Thinking over his career thus far, Clark says, "One of the great things about this profession is the lifelong friends made along the way. You get to have wonderful friendships from coast to coast. I've seen the continuing level of care and integrity so many in our profession provide across the country."

A Look Ahead

Clark is excited by the recent tide of new O&P technology and sees even more sweeping changes ahead. "What I tell people all the time who are thinking about prosthetics and orthotics as a career is that our profession will see more change and new technology in the next ten to 15 years than we have seen since the Civil War." He

continues, "We now have the expectation of enabling our patients to return to the true functional level they had before." Research and technology developed by non-traditional sources outside O&P are helping to drive this wave, Clark believes, as experts in diverse areas of scientific, engineering, and medical disciplines join forces in developing new rehabilitation technology and techniques.

Clark sees more outsourcing of O&P fabrication as a new generation of clinicians emerges from the O&P education programs. "When I started in O&P, clinicians in the office taught you to be a technician—how to refine your technical skills and learn tricks of the trade. Now clinicians are receiving a more didactic education based around patient evaluations, measurements, outcomes, and appropriate patient care levels with more knowledge of disease states and related disciplines. Clinician education now is more about patient management than manufacturing." He adds, "Gone is the day when a clinician needs to think, 'I'm the only one who can make everything because I'm the only one who can make it the way I want it made.'"

"A practitioner's time is better spent seeing patients and on other activities which make dollars for the practice. We don't have the margin anymore to spend time in the lab," he adds.

Clark believes the quality of patient care is strengthened by spending more time in patient management and in collecting outcomes data that can be shared with others, producing evidence-based practice (EBP), and developing standards and outcome expectations.

Although Clark appreciates the profession moving to an entry-level master's degree requirement, he strongly feels that a degree and credentials alone are no assurance to payers of positive outcomes. "Once we can show payers true, reliable evidence, they will see the value of working with trained, credentialed practitioners and accredited organizations versus those that aren't."

Mentoring Upcoming Generations

Clark praises those who have shared their clinical and business knowledge and the outstanding educators who have spent their lives educating students of O&P. "They not only have worked for their own interests but also to advance the profession.

"Those of us who have been in the profession for a long time need to be mentoring—sharing our knowledge and experience with those entering the field," he continues. "We also need to be patient and remember that when we were right out of school, we knew everything too. But someone took the time with us to help us learn more, and we too need to help the ones entering the profession to expand their outlook as much as we've been able to. I was fortunate to have my father as a mentor; he was not only a great teacher and prosthetist, but also very patient, and I needed that."

Clark and his wife Susan are heading for new horizons in family life too, as they have recently adopted two boys, Cayden, age three, and Luke, age one. Their older children are Brandt, 29, and Sarah, 26, who is following her father into O&P as the third generation. She is currently gaining experience by working at O&P¹. O&P EDGE

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