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**News**  
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\*\*\*\*New Prosthetics and Orthotics  
Program will train professionals  
to work with those with physical  
disabilities.

DALLAS--People tell Bruce McClellan he's awfully cheerful for a man who has to have braces to walk.

"I look at it this way," he says. "Having a disability is kind of like getting dealt a hand in a game of cards. You've got two choices: you can fold your hand, or play it for all it's worth. I'm playing."

McClellan, "Mac" to his friends, has had some insight into the "patient side" of health care management. As a child he contracted polio and has had to use a brace and crutches since he started to walk.

Now McClellan is taking on a new challenge: organizing and directing the new Prosthetics and Orthotics Program in the School of Allied Health Sciences at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas. This new program will be only the third bachelor's degree program of its kind in the country. (The other two are at New York University and at University of Washington.)

Orthotics is the discipline that deals with external support of weak or disabled parts of the body. From this word, the term "orthosis" (brace) is derived. The "orthotist" treats many different disabilities ranging from the extremities to the spine. Most often orthoses are custom fabricated specifically for a patient's needs.

Prosthetics is the profession that involves the replacement of body parts lost to amputation. The "prosthetist" is the health care professional who provides the artificial limb or prosthesis for the patient. These also are custom fabricated for the patient.

Professionals may be certified in orthotics, prosthetics or both disciplines. The designated title of a certified practitioner is either C.O. (certified orthotist), C.P. (certified prosthetist) or C.P.O. (certified prosthetist-orthotist).

The new bachelor's program reflects movement within the profession to upgrade educational and training standards for these professionals. A number of orthotists and prosthetists now have bachelor's or associate's degrees. Others now practicing learned their skills as apprentices.

Students entering the SAHS program will have at least two years of college with a background in the sciences. They will study anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, pathology, patient management skills and fabrication technique among others. Specialized training in specific prosthetic-orthotic systems will form the core of the program. The students will also serve clinical rotations just as the physician assistant and physical therapy students do.

Students will be eligible to stand for certification after they receive their B.S. in prosthetics and orthotics and have one year of professional experience. The first class will begin in August with a maximum of six students.

(over)



Other certified instructors in the program are Mel Stills, C.O., and Dan Snelson, C.P.O. Another full-time C.P.O. is currently being sought to join the faculty. The Prosthetics-Orthotics Program is a part of the Department of Health Care Sciences.

McClellan comes to direct the program from Los Angeles where he was office manager of Orthomedics-Orthopedic Hospital and lecturer at the University of Southern California School of Medicine. He has served as orthotic instructor and staff orthotist at Rancho Los Amigos Hospital in Downey, Calif., and as assistant prosthetic lab instructor at Cerritos College in Norwalk, Calif. He worked as a prosthetist for J.E. Hanger Inc. in Dallas from 1972 till 1975. He received a B.S. in Health Science from California State University-Dominguez Hills in 1980 and is a certified prosthetist-orthotist.

There is definitely a need for more orthotists and prosthetists in this country. Professionals estimate that there should be a minimum of eight practitioners per million population or 15 per million for a high level of care. The profession has generally been running behind these figures in the past. Yet, despite the position at the low end of the scale in the supply of orthotists/prosthetists, some schools have had to close their programs because they are so expensive to run. Equipment and materials are costly, and much of the instruction has to be one-to-one.

An orthotist/prosthetist does a lot more than "make things" to help the patient, says McClellan. "We are in the business of rehabilitating people. For example, a new amputee often goes through the same stages of grieving that a dying patient goes through--anger, denial, depression. Though the patient's loss may ultimately be a leg rather than his life, he must work through that difficult period. The practitioner must be sensitive to that patient as a complete human being rather than simply as an amputee who needs a prosthesis."

Orthotists and prosthetists are an integral part of the clinical team in most medical centers. A prosthetist may see a patient before an amputation for evaluation and actually apply a temporary prosthesis in the operating room immediately after the amputation. In any case, prosthetists and orthotists offer many different alternatives of treatment for their patients.

Is this a depressing business to be in? "Oh, no far from it," says McClellan. The role of the orthotist and prosthetist is to rehabilitate the patient as much as possible. Seeing a patient return to a productive happy life again after a physical set back is a great reward."

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