

# Durable Medical Equipment

## Statement of the Problem:

Americans with disabilities have greatly benefited from advances in rehabilitative technologies. While these advances often minimize the amount of residual disability and dysfunction, the day to day mobility and daily living needs of a disabled person frequently require the use of adaptive equipment to maximize functional abilities and preserve health.

Insurers have responded to escalating health care costs by restricting funding for specific items of adaptive equipment and for entire categories of such equipment. They attempt to justify these exclusions by stating that equipment is a "convenience" or "household equipment," and thus ineligible for coverage. Currently, coverage decisions are regionally and situationally arbitrary and capricious. Even within a specific region and situation, exclusions vary from specific carriers because of the different beliefs and interpretations of individual claims representatives.

As a consequence, Americans with disabilities are forced into unnecessarily hazardous situations and placed in positions of unnecessary dependency. Health care providers as patient advocates incur considerable expense, inconvenience, and potential liability because of lengthy and repetitive justifications for equipment that is clearly intended to serve patients' safety, mobility and daily living needs.

Insurers may responsibly inquire concerning the medical necessity, appropriateness and effectiveness of requested medical equipment. Such requests should be answered in good faith by the attending physician. It is critical that the decisions regarding appropriateness and effectiveness be left in the hands of physicians knowledgeable both about the patient in question and the disability being treated. Appropriate documentation is recognized as essential to cost effective care. Lists of equipment often necessary in the management of disability are available and may be used as reference, such as Durable Medical Equipment for the Patient with Spinal Cord Injury, published by the American Spinal Injury Association (ASIA) and available from the ASIA office.

## Position:

We, the members of the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, support the needs of our patients in the achievement of optimal function, safety and mobility. We believe that access to necessary equipment enabling these needs should be uniform, and not dependent upon regional interpretation of rules or policy language.

Furthermore, we believe that insurers should provide specific descriptions of medical equipment coverage in language that is readily and uniformly understandable by patients, health care providers and claims representatives. We believe that equipment required for long term use should be purchased rather than rented, thus eliminating the rejustification of need at unreasonable intervals.

Equipment intended to enhance patient safety and independence is economically beneficial to the patient, to the insurers and to society. In recognition of this, the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation supports the restructuring of governmental and insurance carrier policies to insure uniform access to durable medical equipment by all Americans with disabilities who require such equipment.

Approved BOG 8/2012