

Editorial

Non-profit group goes 'out on a limb' to help

Healthcare companies and organizations work to make sure that people who need an artificial limb receive one

By Joe Sansone - [05.2007](#)

David Reid lost his right leg due to complications of diabetes in 2005 and without a prosthetic limb was forced to crawl on his hands and knees for almost three years. That changed recently. Reid took his first steps since that fateful day and is not looking back. After suffering the loss of a limb, Reid learned that artificial limbs were not part of his healthcare coverage, and he had no financial resources for a prosthetic device. After repeated attempts to obtain financial assistance for an artificial leg, he became discouraged with his "Catch-22" situation. Reid couldn't obtain a loan without a job, but he couldn't get a job without a limb.

Searching for a Limb On several occasions, Reid visited companies who excitedly scheduled an appointment, evaluated him for an artificial leg but scurried away when they discovered that his insurance did not cover a prosthetic device. Undaunted, he persevered. He never gave up and decided, once again, to roll the dice and ask for help. I'm not joking when I say he literally hopped into The Amputee & Prosthetic Center in Houston. There he met Ben Falls, CP, LPO, who's not only a prosthetist but also an amputee himself.

"The Lord blessed me," said Reid, who's voice quivers with emotion as he describes his chance meeting with Falls. "I told Ben my story; he examined my leg and looked me in the eyes. He said to me, 'Son, I won't shoot you down. You'll be hearing from us in a few days. But I guarantee you this--we'll get you a limb.' " Falls had found the first patient for the Limbs of Love project, a nonprofit effort supported by Amputee & Prosthetic Center (a subsidiary of my company, TMC Orthopedic) and other healthcare companies like HealthSouth and ARTech. Over the coming months, Limbs of Love will donate up to 20 prosthetic limbs--valued at more than \$250,000--to those who have suffered the loss of a limb and have been previously turned away.



DAVID REID takes his first step in almost three years after being fitted with a prosthetic leg through the Limbs of Love

Lack of Medical Coverage

Unfortunately, due to the high cost of artificial limbs, a growing number of insurance companies either cap or eliminate benefits for prosthetic devices. Without coverage, many cannot afford to purchase a prosthetic limb. Imagine being a productive member of society, working a job to support your family, and relying on your healthcare coverage for your medical needs. Then, after years of paying healthcare premiums every month, you are slapped in the face with the cold hard realization that your insurance will not cover an artificial leg that costs over \$10,000.

Through Limbs of Love, we can provide a new sense of confidence for amputee patients to move on with their lives. Health insurance will no longer be the determining factor in who will walk again, who will have a job, or who will be able to care for their family as a result of this organization.

Hope for Amputees

Amputees have another reason to feel hopeful. The Amputee Coalition of America and others are supporting legislation that will require healthcare companies to provide better coverage for prosthetic and orthotic devices. Texas Amputees and coalition members want insurance companies to cover claims for these services, at a minimum, in the same amounts that the federal government pays through its Medicare program. In Texas, Sen. Judith Zaffirini and Rep. Pete Gallego have sponsored bills in the state House and Senate to offer coverage for the insured. Similar bills have passed in a number of states.

With the passage of these "Prosthetic Parity" bills, patients like David Reid who have suffered the loss of a limb may not have to struggle for years until they can obtain a prosthetic device.

When asked how he felt when he heard that after two and a half years he would take his first steps since his amputation, David fought back tears and said his life would change. After expressing gratitude to Falls, his prosthetist, he grinned when he said he most looked forward to hunting and fishing again.

---Joe Sansone is CEO of TMC Orthopedic.---



Local media outlets gave the story plenty of coverage. Over the coming months, Limbs of love will donate up to 20 prosthetic limbs valued at more than \$250,000 to people who, like Reid, have been denied assistance by insurance companies.