

AMERICA'S HEROES

Iraq Injuries Highlight Advances In Prosthetics

(NAPSA)—Hundreds of American soldiers have returned from fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan as amputees, with more than 100 having lost multiple limbs. Fortunately, dramatic improvements in prosthetics are restoring mobility and productivity to these injured heroes.

Some of these innovations include:

- Microprocessor knees—the standard for U.S. soldiers in need of a lower-limb prosthesis. They make hundreds of calculations per minute to adapt to a user's gait; and
- Targeted muscle re-innervation (TMR), which reroutes nerve signals in an amputee's residual limb, allowing him or her to "feel" and sense movement in the artificial limb.

"The Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have led the way with a huge commitment of resources for research and development to identify superior materials and technologies that have provided a quantum leap in our therapeutic alternatives," says Ted Snell, a certified prosthetist, president of C.F.I. Prosthetics and Orthotics, as well as 2006-07 president of the American Orthotic & Prosthetic Association (AOPA).

Everyone Benefits

In addition to soldiers, civilians reap the benefits of advanced prosthetics and increased funding for research. For instance, Heather Mills—a below-knee amputee—was highly praised for her appearance on ABC's "Dancing With the Stars." And Oscar Pistorius—a 20-year-old South African double amputee who competed in Athens at the 2004 Paralympics—is now running the 200- and 400-meter sprints fast enough to earn a spot on the official Olympic team.



Advances in prosthetics have helped many, such as Sergeant Michael McNaughton, overcome serious injuries.

Although the advances in orthotics (orthopedic braces) and prosthetics are considered "good news" stories for many, there are still challenges to overcome. For example, comparing Medicare payments in 2003 against 2005 payments, dollars paid for orthotic and prosthetic devices declined while the number of devices provided increased.

"We need some basic protections to assure that both government and private insurers provide appropriate reimbursement and coverage for orthotics and prosthetics. This will help guarantee the best possible outcomes in restoring the level of function to which all our patients are entitled," says AOPA President-Elect Brad Ruhl, vice president of Otto Bock HealthCare, an international orthotics and prosthetics manufacturer.

For more information, visit www.AOPAnet.org.