



WOUND CARE & HYPERBARIC CENTERS: A SIGNIFICANT BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY AND REIMBURSEMENT SOLUTION

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The changes that seem to be endless in the Home Care/HME industry require organizations to review their business models and look for opportunities to integrate new services and programs that mitigate the loss in reimbursement associated with the changes and one such opportunity is the development of wound care and hyperbaric centers. The demand for wound care management has never been higher than it is today! Each year an estimated 4-10 million people suffer from chronic non healing wounds that cost the economy millions of dollars. Approximately 80% people with chronic non-healing wounds are from long-term care centers or the growing home care setting. As the population grows older, wound care management will become an even greater concern and the expense associated with patients who have untreated wounds will be staggering. There is significant potential for savings for the economy that could be gained through early treatment in comprehensive wound care centers. In spite of the demand, there are few centers in most communities that specialize in wound care management. In fact, most physicians who treat these patients are not equipped to deal with the issues and as a result refer patients to specialists who rely on patient compliance and follow through to ensure successful treatment and outcomes and because of problems they associate with treatment, most prefer not to deal with it at all. Wound care centers can only reach ambulatory patients, or about 15-20% of those in need of care. Clearly, the demand for wound care management and the specialized centers has never been higher. A significant need exists for a fully integrated state of the art program for the provision of wound care and hyperbaric medicine services across the continuum in many locations throughout the country and there is currently an unmet need. The incidence of chronic non-healing wounds in most metropolitan areas exceeds 2% of the general population. Home Care/HME Providers with Comprehensive Wound Care Centers of Excellence will be poised to respond to the increasing demand for quality wound care treatment and solutions for skin integrity disruptions. The population is aging with declining health statistics inclusive of a rise in diabetes and associated difficult-to-heal wounds and engenders a growing need for a structured comprehensive approach. The field of wound care management is rapidly growing and more importantly, profitable. Home Care/HME Providers are ideal candidates to engage in the development of wound care centers to relive the pressures and stress associated with the issues regarding reimbursement.

What's the Big Deal with Wound Care?

The financial impact to the U.S. healthcare system for treating chronic wounds exceeds \$20 billion annually. In addition, an average of \$8.5 billion is spent on wound care products and services. The incidence of diabetic foot ulcers is growing at a rate of 14% per year and accounts for 80% of all chronic wound expenditures. There are currently no comprehensive programs for the general population at large and only a few experts in the physician community are equipped to meet the need. This presents a tremendous opportunity to address the need in your community through a center that would utilize state-of-the art technology with a surgically oriented evidence-based practice focused on education, prevention and the healing of wounds. Wound care centers treat patients typically age 50 and older who have lesions that don't heal properly. Many people who develop chronic wounds have diabetes or peripheral vascular disease that cause poor blood circulation and, thus, impede healing. If hard-to-heal wounds are left untreated, those patients could lose an extremity or even their lives.

Hyperbaric Chambers

One way to treat chronic open wounds is with hyperbaric chambers -- clear tubes that are about 6 feet long and 36 to 45 inches in diameter. There are monoplace (single patient use per treatment) and multiplace (multiple patient uses at the same time for treatment) chambers however the vast majority of free standing wound care centers use monoplace chambers. Typically a patient receives treatment for 45 - 60 minutes once a day for four to eight weeks, but some require several months of treatment. Hyperbaric chambers are also used to treat scuba divers who get decompression sickness also known as the bends as well as victims of carbon monoxide poisoning. Some manufactures of these specialized chambers are Sechrist, (www.sechristind.com) and Perry (www.perrybaromedical.com). During treatment with HBOT patients are typically placed in the supine position or semi-elevated on stretchers inside the chambers while their wounds are hyper-saturated with oxygen, which helps improve healing. Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy or HBOT is a procedure in which a patient breathes 100 percent oxygen while relaxing in a pressurized chamber. The oxygen accumulates in the chamber and delivers high concentrations of oxygen to the blood stream and the wound bed, which rap-

idly accelerates the healing process. Wound care centers that include HBOT realize more financial benefits as a result of the reimbursement associated with the treatment. Some projections indicate that the clinic with Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) will produce a small profit margin in the first year of operation and a significant margin over the first three years. The pull through for Home Care/HME Providers in addition to the revenue derived from the comprehensive wound care center includes orders for diabetic related supplies, nutritional supplementation, HME equipment and supplies, supplemental oxygen, pharmaceutical services and supplies and more importantly additional referrals from hospitals and physicians thus creates a significant competitive advantage over providers who do not provide comprehensive wound care services.

Real Solutions to Reimbursement Issues

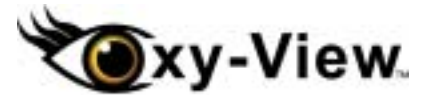
The financial benefits of developing and implementing comprehensive wound care programs are significant yet are always preceded by improved patient care and quality of life. Wound care can sometimes prevent the need for amputations and improve the outcomes and healing rates of patients suffering from long standing open wounds. Comprehensive wound care treatment, supplemented by hyperbaric therapy, is becoming the standard of care simply because it works. Wound care dramatically enhances the quality of care in a cost effective manner. The reason Medicare, health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and health insurers reimburse for this care is that studies show it is clinically effective and cost effective. The cost savings of avoiding an amputation or avoiding the need for long term care for a problematic wound are significant. A well-managed wound care center provides a real solution to the challenges faced by the industry with reduction in reimbursement for traditional services and provides new and challenging opportunities for Home Care/HME Providers and moreover, physicians in your community will embrace the services thus, the wound care center ends up being a resource for physicians in the community for treating their most difficult cases that might otherwise linger for years. Rather than wait around for solutions to the reimbursement woes now is the time to look for real solutions such as wound care and hyperbaric centers to improve your bottom-line.

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