

# HomeCare<sup>®</sup>

The Leading Business Magazine for HME Professionals



Image courtesy of Orthofeet

## Step Up Your Business With Therapeutic Footwear

story by CHARLES LIBERGE, ORTHOFEET

Increase sales and help improve customers' foot health by mixing up your HME product offerings

The overall marketplace for HME/DME providers is more challenging than ever due to the continuously evolving health care system and competitive bidding. As providers remain on the lookout for reliable, sustainable business strategies, there is one retail model among several that stands out as a smart move: therapeutic footwear.

Specialty medical footwear is one of the strongest paths to retail success within HME circles. Managed with a patient-centric approach, sales of medical footwear can generate strong, consistent revenue opportunities from current customers, and they can also open doors to new ones. Above all, a footwear program provides a

differentiating service for short- and long-term growth with products that are highly desirable to the community you serve.

If you already carry therapeutic footwear, determine whether or not you are maximizing sales opportunities. After all, everyone wears shoes—and as an HME provider, your customer base is predisposed to special footwear needs. Reach out to existing customers proactively through creative in-store display options. Many manufacturers offer retail display assistance to develop innovative ways to market these products to your expanding customer base. You'll be surprised at how easy it is to integrate therapeutic footwear seamlessly into your product lines.

### DIABETES AND FOOT CARE

If you are interested in developing a shoe program for diabetic customers, choose a brand that can partner with you effectively to increase your ability to develop a sustainable revenue stream.

A large portion of your current customer base likely suffers from diabetes, which automatically puts them in a high-risk group for medical foot problems. In addition to monitoring their blood glucose levels, watching their diets and staying active, adults with diabetes need to be vigilant about foot care. Diabetes patients are highly vulnerable to a variety of medical problems due to their compromised vascular system, including

neuropathy, foot ulcers and, ultimately, lower extremity amputations.

More than 20 years ago, the government realized that therapeutic footwear could help prevent lower limb amputations in diabetes patients. They established the Therapeutic Shoe Bill, a law that enables Medicare to cover the cost of one pair of shoes and three inserts annually for qualified patients. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently cited the bill as one factor in the 65-percent decline in diabetes-related amputations over the past 10 years.

Many diabetes patients simply don't know about the benefit provided by the Therapeutic Shoe Bill. Increase awareness about this opportunity with your diabetes customers by helping them with the logistics of receiving the benefit—and at the same time reinforce your involvement in and concern for their well-being.

#### CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Mobility is never an issue until a customer becomes immobile. Imagine that your body is a house and your feet are the foundation. If something goes wrong with your feet, it is likely that your overall health will be negatively impacted.

For a diabetes patient with neuropathy, ill-fitting footwear can lead to unnoticed irritation, which then leads to blisters, ulcers and potential amputations. Worse yet, some diabetes patients put themselves in harm's way by wearing flip-flops or going barefoot around the house and yard. HME providers are in a direct position to help these customers understand their vulnerability to medical foot conditions and educate them about the importance of preventive foot care and proper footwear to maintain or improve their quality of life.

#### IT'S NOT COMPLICATED

How do you add to your product mix and reinforce your connection with customers? How do you create a diversity of product offerings to

efficiently meet your customer needs? A therapeutic footwear program is efficient, strengthening existing customer connections and creating a new stream of revenue for more business.

Contrary to what you may have heard, executing a therapeutic footwear program does not have to be a time-consuming or complicated process. It is likely that you are already dealing with Medicare reimbursements or similar programs with large insurance companies. The process behind therapeutic footwear is straightforward. Because of the extremely low overhead, your profit margins on shoes can be significant—in many cases, better than the margins on many of the durable goods already in your store.

Simplify the process by aligning with an established partner in the field that can help you navigate the process and build customer loyalty. By partnering with a company focused on the diabetes patient, you can actually lower the cost of acquiring new customers and more easily implement programs that expand your bottom line.

Orthofeet has pioneered an approach to meet the needs of the diabetes patient while reinforcing the connection to the HME provider. The representatives work with providers to facilitate the process with a hands-on, education-based program—with little cost to the provider, generating high returns with minimal risk. The opportunity to create a footwear business that is profitable and incremental is easy to break down.

#### CHOOSE A PRODUCT LINE

The best therapeutic footwear offers a combination of technology, style and function. Look for a line that is biomechanically designed to provide comfort, protection and enhanced mobility—with a range of fashion-forward styles that will appeal to customers. Key attributes to look for when selecting a line of Medicare-approved shoes:

- Protective seamless lining
- Extra depth in the toe area

- Stretchable, nonbinding uppers
- Ergonomic sole that assists natural stride
- Flat foot bed to allow for inserts and orthotics
- Wide range of styles to fit customer preferences

#### NEW SHOE TRENDS

The marketplace is experiencing a dramatic evolution in therapeutic footwear styles. Athletic-inspired footwear is changing the category momentum. As in most industries, the trend follows the customer.

Customers ages 50 and older are part of the Nike generation: They were the first to wear sneakers to school, to church or even with a suit. This generation grew up wearing athletic shoes for all occasions and for most of their waking hours.

As they age and begin to develop problems with their feet, many health care providers prescribe shoes that simply don't match their perception of style. Old-fashioned styles convey the stigma of a medical issue. Patients diagnosed with diabetes are adjusting to management of the disease (using monitoring devices and modifying eating habits). A handful of companies are now offering products that prevent these patients from having to make drastic changes to their fashion tastes and personal style choices.

With the contemporary design and development capabilities available in today's market, there is no reason a medical patient's footwear should look different than any other commercial footwear in the marketplace. The trend in therapeutic shoes is to close the gap between medical footwear and commercial footwear—to match a patient's desire to continue wearing athletic shoes. It's about creating a healthy attitude around footwear fashion—while continuing to better the overall foot health of your customers.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Charles Liberge is the EVP of Sales and Business Development at Orthofeet. He has more than 25 years of experience as a footwear and apparel executive.

## footwear PRODUCTS



#### SIGVARIS DIABETIC COMPRESSION SOCK

The SIGVARIS Diabetic Compression Sock features 18-25mmHg of graduated compression, a nonbinding band, a flat toe seam and soft padding for the foot, as well as DriRelease which helps with moisture wicking. In addition to these features, this all-new product has been clinically proven to alleviate discomfort and edema in patients with diabetes.

Visit [sigvaris.com](http://sigvaris.com).

Circle 263 on card or visit [scproductsinfo.com](http://scproductsinfo.com).





**COMPLETE MEDICAL FASHION LINE  
COMPRESSION SOCKS**

Knee high, closed toe. Graduated compression. Ultra sheer. Latex free. Medical-grade compression socks that do not appear medical. Unisize; fits women's shoe sizes 5-11. Choice of 8-15mmHg or 15-20mmHg compression.

Visit [completemedical.com](http://completemedical.com).  
Circle 264 on card or visit [scproductsinfo.com](http://scproductsinfo.com).



**EASY TO USE PRODUCTS SOCK HORSE  
SOCK AID**

The Sock Horse is easy and fast and features a long 18-inch handle to eliminate bending and strain and a rigid handle with ribbed thumb grips for full control. The Sock Horse uses soft rubber grips to hold the socks while donning. To use, simply place the top of your sock over the soft rubber grips, lower the tool and insert your foot into the opening, then pull upward to put on the sock.

Visit [easytouseproducts.com](http://easytouseproducts.com).  
Circle 265 on card or visit [scproductsinfo.com](http://scproductsinfo.com).



**ALEX ORTHOPEDIC SLIP  
RESISTANT BOOTIES**

These booties are available in six sizes (shoe sizes 1-14) to accommodate a very large segment of the population. They have a full terry knit construction for comfort and warmth and antislip synthetic rubber on the bottom to help prevent falls. The product is designed for men and women and is latex free.

Visit [alexorthopedic.com](http://alexorthopedic.com).  
Circle 266 on card or visit [scproductsinfo.com](http://scproductsinfo.com).





**ORTHOFEET PERFORMANCE SYDNEY WOMEN'S SHOE**

Orthofeet's Performance collection features stylish athletic-inspired shoes, including the Sydney for women. The heel wrap conforms to the foot shape for comfort and lateral support while the highly breathable engineered mesh keeps feet healthy and dry—important factors for diabetes patients. Available in black/salmon, white/gray and white/blue. **HCPCS Code A5500. Visit [orthofeet.com](http://orthofeet.com). Circle 267 on card or visit [sproductsinfo.com](http://sproductsinfo.com).**



**+MD ULTIMATE TRAVEL SOCKS**

Ultimate Travel Socks systematically apply graduated pressure starting strongest at the ankle and decreasing upwards. Soft viscose from bamboo provides a great feel, incredible wicking, and comfort all day long. Gradient compression therapy reduces fatigue while standing, sitting, and traveling and helps to reduce edema (swelling) of legs and feet. These socks serve as effective therapy in prevention of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and aid in the prevention and relief of varicose and spider veins.



**Visit [plusmd.us](http://plusmd.us).**

**Circle 268 on card or visit [sproductsinfo.com](http://sproductsinfo.com).**



**ORTHOFEET PERFORMANCE BARCELONA MEN'S SHOE**

The Barcelona men's shoe is part of the Performance collection from Orthofeet, combining technology, comfort and style with the needs of diabetes patients in mind. The athletic-inspired casual shoe features an innovative outer sole to support ease of movement, help absorb shock and promote a natural stride. Available in black, dark brown and tan nubuck. **HCPCS Code A5500. Visit [orthofeet.com](http://orthofeet.com). Circle 269 on card or visit [sproductsinfo.com](http://sproductsinfo.com).**



**PROPET ADAPTASTEP**

Variable Flex Technology in the new *AdaptaStep* recovery shoe promotes a quicker return to normal gait by changing flexibility as the patient progresses. Soft, breathable nano-silver lining inhibits infection while the breathable fabric upper promotes air circulation to enhance healing. **Visit [propetusa.com](http://propetusa.com). Circle 270 on card or visit [sproductsinfo.com](http://sproductsinfo.com).**



**DR. COMFORT OPEN COMFORT COLLECTION**

Fashion sandals with removable footbeds, exotic textures and classically appointed jewel accessories highlight the women's styles. For men, there is a removable back strap to convert to a slide. All styles have removable footbeds for custom orthotics.

**Visit [drcomfort.com](http://drcomfort.com).**

**Circle 271 on card or visit [sproductsinfo.com](http://sproductsinfo.com).**



**DRIVE MEDICAL EXTRA LONG PLASTIC SHOE HORN**

Drive's Extra Long Plastic Shoe Horn prevents bending or stooping when putting on shoes. It won't snag socks or stockings. Measures 24 inches long and comes retail packaged.

**Visit [drivemedical.com](http://drivemedical.com).**

**Circle 272 on card or visit [sproductsinfo.com](http://sproductsinfo.com).**





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**AETREX APEX T2000  
STRETCHABLE COLLECTION**

Apex T2000 is new to the Stretchables Collection, shoes that provide maximum protection and comfort for individuals suffering from diabetes, arthritis or swollen feet. Designed to limit stress at the areas of the foot most susceptible to pain, the collection includes a single hook and loop strap style that offers adjustability and allows easy entry, even for problem feet. The Apex Stretchables offer a half-inch removable depth and are constructed with three layers that can be removed to provide fitting flexibility and accommodate custom orthotics. Seamless stretchable uppers with smooth insides, the shoes conform to the foot and are safe for people with neuropathy. The soft fabric way moisture and the tiny vents allow air to flow

oting a dry and healthy environment for the foot.  
table.  
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★★★★  
**PEDIFIX DEXTERITY SILICONE  
SCAR CARE**

Pedifix's new assortment of genuine silicone sheets help smooth, soften and improve the texture, color, thickness and feel of scars new and old. Medical-grade materials feature four-way stretch fabric linings so they are sturdy and tear-resistant for extra durability. Self-adhering properties are beneficial and generally do not require any bandages, adhesive or other positioning methods that can be inconvenient for patients. Different shapes, sizes and thicknesses are easily customized for any body part. Visit [pedifix.com](http://pedifix.com).

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The shoe for your shoes experience shoes. Visit [drcomfo.com](http://drcomfo.com)  
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participants wearing the shoes by as putting on your shoes.



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**DRIVE MEDICAL BLUE MAX METAL SHOE HORN**  
Drive's Blue Max Metal Shoe Horn prevents bending or stooping when putting on shoes. It won't snag socks or stockings. Measures 23 inches long and comes retail packaged. Visit [drivemedical.com](http://drivemedical.com).  
Circle 276 on card or visit [sproductsinfo.com](http://sproductsinfo.com).



**JCTS MENTHOGEL FOOT PADS**

These pads provide a refreshing way to soothe foot pain. A pleasant menthol scent helps keep feet feeling fresh all day and prevents odors. A soft, stretchable gel will immediately mold to the exact shape of your foot for a custom fit. The wave and circle patterns absorb shocks and reduce pressure points. A complete line of 11 skus soothes a variety of foot troubles. Supplied in a compact retail box with a window that allows the consumer to touch the material but not the product. One size fits most. Washable.

Visit [ccv-products.com](http://ccv-products.com).

Circle 277 on card or visit [sproductsinfo.com](http://sproductsinfo.com).