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Artificial Limbs

A Review of Current Developments

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The Ratio---Patients : Prosthetists

A. BENNETT WILSON, JR.[1]

REPEATED attempts to determine the number of amputees in the United States have been to little avail. But perhaps it doesn't really matter whether or not we have an exact count of the amputee population, as long as every amputee, now and in the future, receives the service he needs. A knowledge of ratios between types of amputees and of trends in causes and levels of amputations is more important than over-all numbers. Glattly has given us some very illuminating figures that can and have been useful to those whose responsibility it is to plan for the future needs of amputees. From the Glattly reports we learned that during a period between 1961 and 1963 the ratio of lower- to upper-extremity cases fitted for the first time was about 6:1, and that 62 per cent of these lower-extremity patients were over 50 years of age (*Artificial Limbs*, Spring 1963).

Nearly everyone responsible for the treatment of amputees knows from his own experience that the number of patients needing artificial limbs is increasing, and that the great majority of patients responsible for this increase is in the lower-extremity category. This situation is largely the result of three factors. It would naturally be expected that the number of amputees would increase with over-all growth of the population. Another factor is that more people are now living long enough to develop some form of vascular insufficiency that often leads to amputation. Still another factor is that a higher percentage of the geriatric amputee population is now being fitted with a prosthesis than heretofore—following recognition of the fact that the time and effort spent in fitting most elderly patients are more than justified.

Unfortunately, the number of prosthetists in the United States has not increased. The number of prosthetists certified by the American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc., has remained nearly constant for the past decade. Steps are currently being taken to encourage more young people to enter the profession, but a number of years must necessarily pass before these efforts can show results.

Yet, in spite of the fact that the prosthetist:patient ratio is declining, the prosthetists have managed to provide improved service to more patients. A highly respected prosthetist recently estimated that individual prosthetists are

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