



COVID-19 Pandemic: Time to Display the Value of DMEPOS By Doing the Right Thing

Being in the industry for over 20 years, I can speak firsthand to what we've been through together. We've shed blood, sweat, and tears for the attention the industry needs, fair reimbursements that allow businesses to keep their doors open, improve an image that may have been less than stellar, and, even when it seemed impossible, survived competitive bidding when it first reared its head. It didn't come without sacrifice of many, I understand that deeply. The industry looks a lot different than it did just five or 10 years ago. If you are still here, you are truly a warrior!

I've never been so proud of this industry as I've been in the last couple of years when we all really started to come together as one – from large providers, independent providers, manufacturers, distributors, and associations. If we all continue to read from the same playbook with the betterment of Durable Medical Equipment, Prosthetics, Orthotics, and Supplies (DMEPOS) as our goal, providers will thrive and Americans in need of medical equipment, supplies, and related services will be taken care of to the best of our abilities.

The last few weeks have not only been unprecedented for our industry, but for every single one of us in all the roles we play in life – business owner, respiratory therapist, biller, ATP, customer service representative, father, mother, neighbor, friend, husband, wife, son, daughter...the list goes on and on. We wake up each day to another piece of information, another change, and many more unknowns. Providers are on the front line; manufacturers are working around the clock to try and meet the demands across the country. You are tired. You are stressed. You are living on adrenaline. You are worried about your own family and friends.

At the same time, there have been many questions. Can we serve patients virtually? Will documentation requirements change to match the time we are in? Will we be reimbursed? At VGM, we've put all hands-on deck to seek clarification, understand new requirements, and deliver answers back to our members and vendor partners on sometimes an hourly basis. We continue to partner with CQRC, AAHomecare, NCART, and others to ensure we are on the same page, using the weight of all we represent to get your voice heard and drive changes that allow this industry to serve more than it's ever served during this pandemic. And in the future.

Recently, two very important points were made that CMS put into action. (1) Home care equipment companies can help by both the acceleration of getting patients out of the hospital and treating patients before they get to the hospital and use up beds and, (2) If the most dire projections are true, we will need to plan for an equipment shortage for patients in the home.

As a result, CMS acted quickly and has reduced various criteria for respiratory and sleep orders to help us not only get patients out of the hospital, but keep them from ever going into the hospital. The biggest relief is related to the previous chronic stable state requirements, eliminating the requirement. CMS went even further in relaxing signature, documentation, and testing guidelines. We all should be very thankful to CMS for these actions.

Remember: with empowerment comes great responsibility. Everyone in the industry, big and small, must do the right thing. We owe this to each other, and I urge everyone to exercise this great responsibility with actions from the top and relay the message to your entire staff. VGM is dedicated to ensuring that all Medicare beneficiaries receive DMEPOS services at a professional level and equipment of the highest quality possible. The integrity of our industry must be upheld. At the same time, those operating in an illegal or unethical manner must be rooted out.

Fraud Eradication Advisory Team (FEAT)

Our efforts to maintain an ethical society within the DMEPOS industry led to the formation of the Fraud Eradication Advisory Team, or FEAT. VGM, in conjunction with a group of industry stakeholders and an advisory council of consultants, is taking a collaborative approach to combating HME fraud and abuse. FEAT operates as a sounding board for all (including state associations, advocacy groups, manufacturers, providers, and beneficiaries) to assist CMS in its task of rooting out the criminals that are robbing our government of precious healthcare benefit dollars.

We created a [website](#) and electronic reporting tool for use in conveying information about suspected fraud or abuse of the Medicare program. Medicare is a federally funded program created for your healthcare benefit. Fraudulent activities not only steal from the government, but from you as a taxpaying citizen. If you suspect a supplier, physician, clinician, manufacturer, or other entity is committing and act of fraud against Medicare, we ask that you act and report them now. All submissions remain confidential.

Thank you for serving patients across the country. You make a huge difference. Don't forget to take care of yourself and your own family during this pandemic. You can't take care of other people if you are not well yourself. Finally, thank you for displaying the integrity of the entire DMEPOS industry – we all represent each other so let's make each other proud!

We will continue to be the resource you need today and always. Please reach out if you need anything or have any questions.

With greatest respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clint Geffert". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Clint Geffert

President, VGM & Associates



HME during COVID-19: Building Trust and Promoting Value


It's an unprecedented time in our nation's history as we are dealing with this COVID-19 pandemic. While it is tough to see the silver lining of this cloud, one thing that stands out to me is the opportunity for the home medical equipment (HME) community to shine and show the world, especially CMS, the value it brings to the healthcare continuum of care. Allowing sick patients to heal and rehabilitate while at home has always been a core function of HME, but perhaps it was never appreciated or recognized as such by the legislators and policy-makers as it should have been. Never before in our history have we been faced with such enormous challenges with overflowing hospitals needing to discharge patients as quickly as possible in an effort to make room for other more sickly ones. The HME industry is uniquely poised to manage the challenge. With that challenge also comes a responsibility as suppliers seeking funds from the government for reimbursement to be diligent and practical when submitting claims, understanding that they may be scrutinized later down the road.

CMS recently removed Local and National Coverage Determination requirements for oxygen and other respiratory equipment such as PAP, RAD and ventilators, in addition to infusion products. By doing this, it opens up the ability to bill and receive payment for these products in instances that would not have warranted coverage before. It will allow acute patients in the hospital with pneumonia to be discharged home with oxygen on a temporary basis in order to free up the much-needed hospital bed. It will allow for the application of an oxygen concentrator or a ventilator for COVID-19 patients. The possibilities are endless when you consider having no restrictions.

Having no restrictions though also comes with the potential for abuse. Unfortunately, the HME industry has been prone to having a few bad apples spoiling the bunch. CMS has also opened up the enrollment process to allow for entities to enroll and receive temporary billing privileges without being accredited while waiving application fees and background checks, which certainly makes Medicare and our industry vulnerable to unscrupulous outsiders taking advantage of the situation.

We must remain vigilant. We are being given an enormous opportunity by CMS at this moment. An opportunity to shine, provide tremendous value, and help save lives during this pandemic, which could forever change the image of our industry with policy-makers for the future.

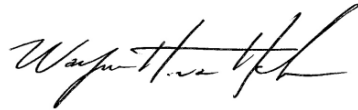
During this time, I think it is important to remember the intent of these relaxed restrictions, which is to enable patients to have access to life-saving medical equipment in order to treat certain conditions and free up space in hospitals. Once this public health emergency (PHE) declaration is lifted, these policies will be reinstated. The audits will return, and claims submitted during this time could be scrutinized later down the road. It is likely that CMS will require that patients who received equipment during the PHE will have to be requalified. It is up to us to track, monitor, and control what we do during this time, not only for the good of the industry, but also because



of our shared responsibility in protecting the Medicare Trust Fund. For example, oxygen equipment or ventilators provided to acute patients will need to be picked up once they are no longer using it, instead of leaving it with the patient and continuing to bill. It is important that we do not take advantage of the situation and instead act intentionally and in the best interest of our patients, the government, and the public.

It is important for an industry to police itself. That is why VGM is reminding everyone that if you are aware of individuals or entities that are committing fraud or abuse, you can alert the [Fraud Eradication Advisory Team \(FEAT\)](#) who will provide information to the appropriate authorities. The HME industry provides value beyond measure to its patients. Historically, it's usually only been those of us who work in the industry or rely on HME that have recognized it. We can change that now. Let's do so consciously and responsibly and do our part to save lives and show the world what we're worth.

With greatest respect,



Wayne H. van Halem

President, The van Halem Group, a subsidiary of VGM & Associates