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Understanding CRT Warranties Takes More Than Just Reading the Small Print

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As a clinician who previously prescribed Complex Rehabilitation Technology, over the years I came to recognize certain patterns when selecting products for those prescriptions. Those patterns included which products worked better clinically and which ones came in the specific colors clients were looking for. Another important factor I considered was which products were known for their durability and which often resulted in follow-up calls related to repairs or failures. Of course, as a clinician, I only saw part of the picture. The CRT suppliers (sometimes referred to as dealers or vendors) I worked with often managed an even greater volume of service calls, repairs and warranty claims.

Now, working on the manufacturer side of the industry, I have gained a greater perspective and appreciation for how products are designed, tested, assessed for risk management and supported through warranty policies. I have had the opportunity to better understand the extensive testing many products undergo before they ever reach a client, as well as the complex considerations manufacturers face when determining warranty coverage and expected product lifespan.

While warranties may not always be the most exciting part of the equipment selection process, they can have a significant impact on long-term satisfaction, service expectations and ultimately a person's mobility and independence. Through this article, I hope to help equipment users, clinicians, suppliers and others involved in equipment recommendations feel more informed and confident when discussing warranties and other related factors.

What is a Warranty?

A warranty is intended to cover defects in manufacturing when a product is used as intended. In other words, if a component fails due to a deficiency under normal use, the manufacturer may repair or replace the affected item according to the terms of the warranty it has established.

This differs significantly from:

- **Normal wear and tear:** gradual degradation expected over time with regular use.
- **Accidental damage:** drops, collisions or environmental exposure.
- **Lack of maintenance:** failing to follow recommended service schedules.
- **Use outside the intended environments or activities.**

Real-world examples

Wheel locks

Wheel locks experience repeated daily use during transfers, repositioning, transportation and mobility, which means adjustment and wear over time can be expected. A wheel lock that becomes loose because mounting hardware was not routinely adjusted or because the wheelchair experienced repeated impacts during transportation or misuse may not qualify as a manufacturer defect. In contrast, a wheel lock mechanism that cracks, fails or no longer functions properly due to a defect in the materials or manufacturing during normal intended use may qualify for warranty replacement.

Power wheelchair batteries

Batteries naturally degrade over time and are heavily influenced by charging habits, environment and maintenance. A user who consistently allows batteries to fully drain for extended periods or leaves the wheelchair unplugged for months may experience premature battery failure that would not necessarily qualify as a manufacturer defect. In contrast, a battery that fails prematurely despite proper charging and maintenance may qualify for warranty replacement.

Modifications

Manufacturers design and test wheelchair frames and components under specific conditions, and altering the structure may change how forces are distributed throughout the product. Drilling into a wheelchair frame to mount an aftermarket accessory, customized tray hardware, or additional positioning components may compromise the structural integrity of the frame and could void portions of the manufacturer's warranty. In contrast, accessories installed using manufacturer-approved mounting points or approved hardware systems are typically designed to maintain the intended structural performance of the product and may not affect warranty coverage.

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Warranties are a Shared Responsibility

Warranties are a shared responsibility among all key players in the CRT industry. Below are definitions and examples to help illustrate the roles everyone plays.

Manufacturers

Manufacturers are responsible for designing products that meet durability expectations and regulatory standards while also establishing warranty policies. Before bringing products to market, manufacturers conduct extensive performance testing to ensure products meet the expected lifespan requirements for their category. For example, manual wheelchairs commonly undergo fatigue and impact testing to validate durability. While industry standards help establish a baseline for performance that manufacturers must meet, they may choose to exceed these standards through design, materials and engineering ingenuity.

When evaluating equipment, it can be valuable for clinicians, suppliers and users to look to the manufacturer to answer:

- What specific components are covered and for how long? For example, are there separate warranty periods for the frame versus electronics, motors or seating?
- What documentation is required to file a claim?
- What are the limitations of a lifetime warranty, and what is considered beyond normal or expected use of the product?
- What internal technical documentation is required to report equipment failure, and how is this information obtained from the supplier or dealer who is providing the service to the end user?
- Why is it important to always provide the equipment serial number when requesting replacement parts under warranty?

Therapists and Suppliers

Therapists and suppliers serve as the link between manufacturers and end users. Their responsibilities are at times distinct while overlapping at other points. Clear communication is required to ensure their roles are complementary and provide user-centered service provision.

Therapists

- Ensure equipment users are informed about warranty terms and conditions.
- Clearly communicate users' clinical, activity and environmental needs that the equipment will be required to meet.
- Ensure proper set-up and training to minimize misuse-related failures or harm.
- Ensure all required equipment modifications meet the client's specific needs without negatively impacting the equipment's structural integrity.
- Provide education on the importance of regular maintenance.
- Educate clients on available funding and required processes for ongoing maintenance and service calls.
- Ensure the client is aware of what is considered a manufacturing defect versus normal wear and tear.
- Provide education on addressing a warranty claim if an issue arises.
- Ensure equipment users are informed about the repair process.

Suppliers

- Communicate warranty terms and conditions during the equipment selection and delivery process.
- Recommend equipment with durability that matches the user's clinical, activity and environmental needs.
- Ensure proper setup and training to minimize misuse-related failures or harm.
- Ensure all required equipment modifications meet the client's specific needs without compromising the equipment's structural integrity.
- Recommend maintenance appointments to catch issues early.
- Educate clients on available funding and required processes for ongoing maintenance and service calls.
- Clearly communicate what is considered a manufacturing defect versus normal wear and tear.
- Assist with addressing a warranty claim if an issue arises.
- Establish clear and realistic expectations of the repair process, including expected timelines, the possibility of loaner equipment and, if available, the essential features needed for client safety versus matching the client's equipment exactly.

Equipment Owners, Users and Care Partners

Users and associated care partners play a direct role in maintaining equipment and using it within its intended limits. Following maintenance guidelines and understanding the boundaries of coverage will contribute to realistic expectations.

What Users Should Know

- Keep all paperwork, including delivery receipts, warranty documents and product serial numbers.
- Follow the maintenance schedule in the user manual.
- Report problems promptly.

- Ask questions. For example, if you're unsure whether an activity might affect coverage.

Funding Programs and Loan Equipment

Warranties can become more complicated when equipment is provided through funding, loan or recycling programs. In some of these situations, the equipment may technically be owned by the funding agency or program rather than the individual user.

A manufacturer warranty is generally tied to the original product owner and warranty period, not necessarily to each new user to whom the equipment may be reassigned. This means warranty coverage may still apply for part of the equipment's lifespan, but some repairs and maintenance may instead fall under the policies of the funding program, vendor contract or recycling program.

An important consideration is that funding programs may have their own rules, service agreements, approved repair processes or replacement timelines that can influence how warranties are managed. In some cases, these program policies may override or limit what is practically available to the user, even when a manufacturer warranty still exists. Because of this, it is important to always review and confirm the specific policies of the funding source or loan program involved. It is also important to understand that manufacturer warranties typically are not transferable and may only apply to the original purchaser or program agreement.

Loan and recycling programs also rely heavily on preventive maintenance and shared responsibility. Because equipment may eventually be reassigned to another user, proper care of the wheelchair and seating system helps support both safety and the long-term sustainability of the program.

Clinicians, suppliers and funding programs should help users understand:

- Who owns the equipment.
- Who authorizes repairs.
- What is covered under manufacturer warranty versus program maintenance.
- What responsibilities remain with the user.
- Which policies are determined by the funding program versus the manufacturer.

Having these conversations early can help prevent misunderstandings and support better long-term equipment outcomes within publicly funded systems.

Recalls and Field Corrections

There are other types of market modifications, besides warranties, such as recalls and field corrections. A recall occurs when a manufacturer identifies a broader defect that could affect multiple users or products. This equipment must be returned to the manufacturer. Recalls are intended to address potential health or safety risks and typically involve repair, replacement or product updates.

A field correction occurs when a manufacturer may provide repair or replacement components, including digital updates, in the field without requiring the product to be fully returned.

In these cases, it is essential to provide all original serial numbers to the manufacturer to ensure compliance and safety. Each manufacturer and supplier must agree on technical training to ensure proper service is completed, and on responsibilities and processes for providing loaner equipment while the repair or component replacement is in progress.

Putting It Into Practice

Warranties exist to protect against manufacturing defects, not to serve as insurance policies. When all parties, manufacturers, suppliers, clinicians and end users understand their roles and communicate clearly, warranty coverage works as intended: a safety net for genuine defects that supports long-term equipment reliability and user confidence.

Steps to better warranty outcomes

1. **Match equipment to actual use.** A mismatch between product category and user activity is a common source of warranty disputes. Be realistic about how and where the equipment will be used.
2. **Discuss warranties early in the process.** Don't wait until delivery. Bring up warranty coverage during equipment trials and selection so users can factor durability and support into their decisions.
3. **Educate users.** Focus on the most important maintenance tasks and the clearest boundaries of coverage. Save the details for documentation they can reference later.
4. **Build relationships with manufacturer representatives.** Standards and processes differ between manufacturers, so when questions arise, having direct contact can speed resolution and clarify gray areas. Honest communication can assist in building the relationship between the supplier and manufacturer and provide a greater understanding of what led to equipment damage or failure.

When recommending a product, it is also important to consider after-sale service. Where is the product manufactured? Are parts

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available locally? What are the shipping times and costs? Do post-sale modifications affect warranty? How long will parts be available after products are changed or discontinued?

Communication is key to setting realistic expectations for how products should be used and maintained, and how service will be provided if repairs are required. Providing a clear understanding of these aspects of service delivery by the equipment provision team is important to ensure that clients, families and caregivers are aware of their responsibilities and the processes to be followed to ensure a safe and positive equipment provision outcome.

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