

Wheels of fortune?

Magic Wheels appears to be one of the most noteworthy manual wheelchair innovations in a long time, but will insurers pay \$5,000?

By Mike Moran Editor - 07.2007

Steve Meginniss is an inventor, not a sorcerer, but he may need to conjure up a little magic if he expects the HME industry to fall under the spell of his new \$5,000 product, Magic Wheels.

In what appears to be one of the most noteworthy innovations to manual wheelchair wheels in a long time, Meginniss has developed an attractive, two-speed wheel that can fit just about any manual wheelchair. (Last fall, Magic Wheels won the Innovation Award at Medtrade.)

When in 1:1 ratio, Magic Wheels operate like standard wheels--its special features invisible to the eye. But when shifted into the low or "reduction" gear (with the flip of a lever on the hub), the ratio drops to 2:1. Much like shifting into low gear in a bicycle, the reduction gear makes it easier to climb and descend hills. Most significantly, the final draft of an independent report released in May by the University of Maryland School of Medicine stated that Magic Wheels "significantly reduced shoulder pain after only two weeks."

"I'm 175 pounds and I'm not in a wheelchair, but if I was, myself and my chair might weigh around 210 or 220 pounds," said Allan Boyd, vice president of business development of Magic Wheels.

"When I engage the reduction gearing, I'm pushing half of that weight. There's never been anything that has reduced the load on one's arm this significantly--unless you look at a power wheelchair or power add-on."

Currently, providers can bill Medicare for Magic Wheels under the K0108 miscellaneous code, but later this year Meginniss expects Medicare to issue a unique HCPCS code for his product and, he hopes, adequate reimbursement.

"It doesn't seem to be a hard sell to CMS," he said.

According to some studies, shoulder-related injuries show up in more than 50% of manual wheelchair users--others estimate the prevalence to be up to 80%. Surgery to repair a damaged shoulder costs many times more than Magic Wheels' \$5,000 price tag. That appeals to Medicare officials, Meginniss said.

"It all makes sense," said Rick Perrotta, president of Network Medical Supply in Charlotte, N.C. "I think it's revolutionary."

That said, he's skeptical CMS will provide adequate reimbursement for such an expensive item, especially with the agency doing everything it can to decrease reimbursement for durable medical equipment. At a lower price, say 10% more than the cost of a standard set of wheels, Magic Wheels could become the industry standard, he said.

Jim Greator expressed a similar sentiment.

"I applaud his efforts, but in the last 18 months, all the guys who sell to us are trying to figure out ways to sell us less expensive products," said Greator, president of Black Bear Medical in Portland, Maine. "If (Meginniss) can get a HCPCS, that is the first thing, but it is a long shot for something like that to be a mainstream product for reimbursement."

Meginniss remains hopeful. He expects to sign a contract with the VA shortly that will put Magic Wheels on the Federal Supply Schedule, and expects a thumbs up from Medicare sometime this year. He also added, declining to go into detail: "We anticipate that it will become more affordable in the future."