the title “certified” for orthotic and mastectomy fitters (Cfo and CFm, respectively, and CFom for those who are dually certified), with an examination requirement taking effect on January 1, 2006. The change from registered to certified was based on an assessment of what those terms meant and the perception of those terms to the profession, as well as on input ABC had received from its registered technicians, assistants, and fitters and their desire to obtain more recognition, Fletcher explains. “Because there is an educational requirement…, an experiential requirement (a certain number of experience hours that you have to meet), and an exam that has to be passed, ABC believes those three things represented certification rather than a registration.”

By 2006, ABC had also seen a need for certified therapeutic shoe fitters (CFts) so it created and added the program to its list of credentials. The driving force was the lack of standards for Medicare suppliers of non-custom diabetic footwear and inserts, Fletcher says. “Diabetic patients are a high-risk population, so the combination of no standards for providers of diabetic shoes to this group created a potential for harm to patients.”

The Future of Fitters

As of January, BOC reported having 2,100 orthotic and mastectomy fitter designations; the actual number of people holding these designations is lower as some might be dually certified. Miller says the number of fitters has been increasing over the years. For the same period, ABC reported 2,699 certified fitters and 2,596 distinct individuals holding fitter credentials. Fletcher says that the numbers can be low at the beginning of the year because some ABC certificants may be late in renewing their certifications for the current year. Having said that, he admits the number of certified fitters—especially orthotic fitters—has decreased. He attributes this, in part, to a 2014 attempt by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to no longer recognize certified orthotic fitters as providers who can independently bill Medicare for custom fitting a prefabricated orthosis. The proposed rule was challenged by the O&P Alliance, which includes ABC, BOC, and other O&P organizations. The rule was finalized without that language, he says.

Fletcher believes the proposed rule had a chilling effect on the orthotic fitter profession. Individuals may be hesitant to seek that certification and practices may be concerned that in the future Medicare will not allow orthotic fitters to independently provide these services.

“There is a gray area right now…, but we continue to work with Medicare to get clarification on that,” Miller adds. “BOC believes, as we did when the fitter certifications were created, that it is better to have a certified professional providing patient care, and the fitters provide a valuable service to the Medicare beneficiary,” she says. “Fitters have the option of asking a practitioner considered to have the specialized training under the quality standards to supervise and/or sign off on their work.”

Fletcher says that CMS’ consideration of fitters is status quo. “We’ve [sic]...