

# REPLACEMENT INTERVALS IN LIFE CARE PLANNING



Dawn L. Cook RN, CLCP, CLNC

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## Abstract

Nurse Life Care Planners provide a report that outlines the total cost for the life care plan (AANLCP, 2013, 2015). The steps involved use the Nursing Process (ANA, 2015), to review the records, communicate with the plaintiff/patient (if possible) and medical providers, then develop a list of future needs. For instance, in a life care plan, equipment recommendations may be made by the life care planner, physicians, chiropractors, therapists, and others (AANLCP, 2013, 2015). Determining when to replace items is a necessary step in formulating the total cost of the life care plan.

## What is Durable Medical Equipment?

Durable medical equipment (DME) is defined by HealthCare.gov as equipment and supplies ordered by a health care provider for everyday or extended use. CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) defines DME related to durability. This definition indicates the equipment:

- can withstand repeated use
- has an expected life of at least 3 years (referred to as the Minimum Lifetime Requirement, MLR)
- is primarily and customarily used to serve a medical purpose
- is generally not useful to an individual in the absence of an illness or injury
- is appropriate for use in the home (CME 42 CFR 414.202)

## Replacement Intervals

One of the factors in determining total cost is the replacement interval for items that are reasonably expected to wear out and need to be repurchased (Albee, Cosby, Beach, 2020). Equipment wears out and needs to be replaced. The frequency of replacement is sometimes difficult to determine. Also, consider that equipment for a child may need more frequent replacement to account for growth. Adaptive equipment, e.g., for athletics, may need more frequent replacement due to wear and tear. However, several sources can help guide decisions on replacement intervals.

Once the replacement interval is known, the life care planner can calculate how many replacements are needed over a lifetime. Calculating annualized costs for equipment is not the best approach, otherwise the report may end up recommended with only enough monetary value for a portion of the cost of an item, either at the end of life or for the specified time interval (Ireland, Pearson, 2004). Recognize that durable medical equipment comes all of a piece. One cannot purchase three-fifths of a wheelchair and it is meaningless to budget for it in that manner. If item replacement comes due at one year before life expectancy, cost in full is indicated and should be so noted in the plan. (AANLCP, 2013).

Some equipment may already be purchased before the creation of the life care plan. In this case, the life care planner or the economist will need to know the date of the next purchase and the intervals for replacement afterward (Dillman, 2018).

## Determining Replacement Intervals

There are many ways to determine replacement intervals, and the life care planner may choose them based on many factors. There may be no right way or wrong way to determine the interval for replacements, but being aware of common sources can help the life care planner determine best methods for intervals that will be applied to each of the future medical care equipment items. It is also important to remember that many estimates on replacement intervals are not determined by the actual useful life of an item as determined by historical data, but on coverage decisions determined by insurance carriers, including Medicare/Medicaid. When an item is covered by a life care plan, these do not come into play; therapists and patients may have more realistic estimates for the actual life of an item.

### 1. Manufacturer's warranty and extended warranties

- Manufacturer's warranties can be found on websites that sell the product and also from the manufacturer.
- Inquire if an extended warranty can be purchased, as this may provide a better estimation of what an item can be reasonably expected to remain usable.

### 2. Recommendations from physicians, therapists, or vendors

- The medical providers or vendors for the plaintiff/patient may have individualized recommendations for replacement intervals for their patient. These may be used and should be quoted as the source of the replacement interval in the life care plan.

### 3. Research life care planning journals

- Journal of Nurse Life Care Planning
- Journal of Life Care Planning

### 4. Medicare

- Medicare (cms.org) has lists of equipment and replacement intervals for items that Medicare may provide payment for.

## SPECIFIC EQUIPMENT

### Adapted Vans, Cars, and Equipment

Normally, vans and cars have a replacement interval of 5-10 years (Henry, 2020), but the additional equipment in an adapted vehicle may have shorter replacement values. The adaptations may require more research into the specific manufacturer's recommendations, or the life care planner could speak with vendors for more input. Another resource for replacement intervals is a Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist (CDRS). Equipment such as steering knobs, left foot accelerator pedal, push-pull steering control, and panoramic mirrors may be added to a vehicle (King, 2018). Remember to account for any warranty in force at purchase; it may be different for a used vs new vehicle.

### Prosthetics

Artificial arm and leg prosthetics have to be replaced when they wear out or beyond repair. A useful method for determining prosthetic replacement intervals is to look at the history of the prosthetic user (Powell, 2020). The Amputee Coalition discusses wear and fit issues on its website. However, many life care plans are developed at the beginning of the prosthesis use, and there may not be a history to review.

Medicare designates prosthetics to have a useable life of no less than five years (cms.org).

A recent article in the JNLCP states that 5 years may be a reasonable replacement interval; there are also guidelines for the various parts and accessory replacements for prosthetics (Berry, 2020). Extended warranties may lengthen the life of prostheses (Hsu, Waryck, 2017), and this could be considered when planning how often to replace components of a

prosthetic. Check with the current provider to see what is available.

Facial prosthetics have a shorter lifetime of 2-4 years, although replacements can be made for half the original cost (Duncan, Calhoun, 2015). Finger prosthetics may have a shorter replacement interval depending on their components and "skin"; providers should be consulted.

## Service Dogs

Service dogs might not be a piece of equipment but if they are needed for the plaintiff, then replacement intervals must be considered. Service dogs generally have a working life of about 8-10 years and then will need to be retired (Guide Dogs of America, n.d.). (*The JNLCP plans an article on service dogs for February 2021 ~ Ed.*)

## Common DME in Life Care Planning

CMS says that DME has a reasonable useful lifetime (RUL) of five years and will not replace the equipment before five years unless it is lost, stolen, or broken (Noridian, 2017). The ruling was updated in 2017 and includes orthotics and prosthetics.

- Pressure reducing beds, mattresses, and mattress overlays used to prevent bed sores
- Blood sugar monitors
- Blood sugar (glucose) test strips
- Canes (white canes for the blind are not covered)
- Commode chairs
- Continuous passive motion (CPM) machines
- Crutches
- Hospital beds
- Infusion pumps and supplies
- Manual wheelchairs and power mobility devices (power wheelchairs or scooters needed for use inside the home, not only for outside use)
- Nebulizers and some nebulizer medications
- Oxygen equipment and accessories
- Patient lifts
- Sleep apnea and Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) devices and accessories
- Suction pumps
- Traction equipment
- Walkers

- Orthopedic shoes only when they're a necessary part of a leg brace
- Arm, leg, back, and neck braces (orthotics)
- Artificial limbs and eyes
- Breast prostheses (including a surgical bra) after a mastectomy
- Ostomy bags and certain related supplies
- Urological supplies
- Therapeutic shoes or inserts for people with diabetes who have severe diabetic foot disease
- Cataract glasses (for aphakia, absence of the lens of the eye)
- Conventional glasses or contact lenses after surgery with insertion of an intraocular lens
- Intraocular lenses (DHHS, n.d.)

## If All Else Fails

If the life care planner is unable to find a replacement interval for the DME after considering the warranty, the plaintiff's history of replacement needs, physician or therapist recommendations, or searching literature and internet information, it is reasonable to assume the five-year rule could apply to equipment that is similar to the equipment that is covered by Medicare. Items such as slide boards, commode chairs, shower chairs, elevated toilet seats, hand-held shower heads, grab bars, eating devices, cooking devices, hand controls, and one-footed foot pedal and steering knob for driving could be reasonably replaced at five-year intervals. One way to manage this is to put in an annual allowance for such materials and allow the individual to manage how to apply it.

Finally, be aware that if an individual has equipment received from a charity or other source that is not a vendor, it will likely not be covered for any warranty and the vendor may not even consent to service it for any reason. It may be best to provide for new DME as soon as possible to protect the user from interruptions in service, e.g., a broken bed.

## Conclusion

Determining the replacement intervals for all of the equipment needed in the life care plan is one of the steps in determining the overall lifetime cost of that item. Explaining your methodology or resources used in determining the replacements provides further evidence of the accuracy and reliability of your plan.



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