

## Blake Barlow, CP, LPO, FAAOP



**Blake Barlow says he's a believer in "prenatal destiny"—**the providence that drives my passion for O&P." Born with proximal focal femoral deficiency (PFFD) in 1960, his path toward an accomplished career in prosthetics was set early on.

At the age of two, the Atlanta, Georgia, native received his amputation surgery from Richard King, MD, whom Barlow says "performed surgery on me that is still considered state-of-the-art to this day." At age 16, Barlow saw the interior workings of Southern Prosthetics Supply (now SPS) of J. E. Hanger Inc., Atlanta. Barlow says, "My previous experience had led me to believe that this field of human endeavor was new to African Americans. There, I discovered that myriad O&P technologies were produced and implemented by practitioners and technicians of African American heritage such as Aubrey Smith, CP; Hanif Chardary, CP; Willie Booth; Clarence Williams; and Ernest Jackson, to name just a few. These men were involved in every aspect of prosthetics/orthotics." Barlow remained a patient of the facility for approximately 18 years.

Barlow received a bachelor of professional studies degree from the University of Memphis, then, in 1984, a certificate

of prosthetics from Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois. Five years later, he was appointed chief of prosthetics and sensory aids for the Oklahoma City Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). In 1998, he and his "wife and inspiration" (Elishea Barlow, OTR/L), founded Genuine Care Rehabilitation Services, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, to provide a variety of orthotic, prosthetic, and activities-of-daily-living supplies. In the same year, he received a patent for a prosthetic sportswear undergarment that he designed to be highly functional and fashionable.

A member of the International African American Prosthetic-Orthotic Coalition (IAAPOC), Barlow maintains a strong interest in the work of African Americans in O&P.

### 1. How has your career progressed?

• My parents, Willie J. and the late Thelma Barlow, nurtured me and my career. As I embarked on my mission in life, Mark Phelps, CP, and Morris Turman, RPT, became instrumental in my success by sharing their professional knowledge and inspiration. In 1999, I became the first African American Fellow of the American Academy of Orthotists and Prosthetists [the Academy]. That year, I also received the Veterans Administration Scissor Award—the VA's highest award—for improving the provision of O&P service to veterans by implementing the most extensive use of CAD/CAM manufacturing in the department's history. My team also received the Hammer Award, the U.S. vice president's award for government efficiency. In 2005, I launched prostheticfashions.com to market my invention.

### 2. What are your professional goals?

• My goal is to work with manufacturers to provide valuable feedback on the functionality of knee designs. Prosthetic components need more than just robotic testing. They must be evaluated by professionals who can provide scientific analysis to support industry claims.

### 3. Please describe what your company does.

• Genuine Care Rehabilitation Services provides equipment for activities of daily living, plus low-vision aids, bathroom-safety equipment, custom shoes, specialty gifts, and books. We also provide prosthetic and orthotic services through a partnership with La Fuente Prosthetics Center, also located in Oklahoma City. We provide Urgent Repair Kits, early intervention, and home health.

### 4. Please describe your approach to patient care.

• Care of any kind must be individual, lifestyle-focused, and simple. The less time a beneficiary is preoccupied with what will happen next, the more time we all have to enjoy life.

### 5. What advice would you give to someone just entering the O&P profession?

Study electronic engineering, physics, biomechanics, and robotics because they all enhance prosthetics and orthotics. Prepare for research and development—it's key. **O&P EDGE**

