

The Surgical Support and Corset Department

by MRS. LORAIN ISLE DILLARD

The W. E. Isle Co., Kansas City, Mo.

A surgical support department is a logical expansion of the service which an orthopedic and prosthetic appliance facility may offer to physicians and their patients. A successful appliance firm develops good working relations with members of the medical profession in its community. Adding surgical supports broadens the service offered to this professional clientele. The new department may be the means of attracting referrals from physicians who are not regularly sending patients to the facility. It then follows that knowing and serving more doctors will reflect an increased sales in all departments.

This conclusion is based on our own experience in operating a surgical support and corset department since 1929. Some orthopedic doctor friends requested that we establish this department and advised us about the type of supports that they would prescribe. We bought an initial stock of garments, built a stockroom, and at first used the fitting rooms which were also used for prosthetic and orthopedic appliance fittings. In the early days many fittings were made in the doctors' treatment rooms. The doctor would telephone, giving us the patient's waist and hip measurement, and ask our fitter to bring a selection of supports to his office to make the fitting. We profited by rendering this extra service, for in this way we soon learned the kind of support and fitting which respective doctors would approve.

Most fittings are made in our shop now, but we always ask the customers fitted on referrals to return to the physician to have the garment and the fitting checked. When requested by physicians, we send fitters to hospitals to take care of patients who are unable to come in to our shop.

We have always recognized that success depends in large part on capable, tactful corsetieres. Applicants with experience are rare. We try to select those who have a genuine interest in learning this work and then provide initial training in the shop under an experienced fitter. Excellent courses are offered each year by manufacturers of surgical supports. We have found that the cost of sending fitters to these courses is a worthwhile investment. Our fitters have also taken special courses in Gross Anatomy and Kinesiology offered by the University of Kansas Extension Bureau.

In our operation various forms of advertising have been used to promote sales of surgical supports . . . direct mailings to doctors, *Medical Journal* advertising, consumer ads in the local newspaper and the yellow section of the telephone directory. Probably the best advertisement has been satisfied customers who tell their friends about Isle service.



Interior View—Fixtures and Layout were designed by an architect.

Originally we confined our work to surgical support fittings and elastic hose. Later many customers who no longer required surgical supports requested that we sell style foundations. Responding to this demand, we added lines of style merchandise.

The time came when we had outgrown the space allotted to the support and corset shop on the second floor. So when a shop in our building on the street level floor was vacated we decided to open a modern foundation and surgical support store for ladies exclusively.

The layout and fixtures were designed by a professional store architect who worked closely with us so that the store when finished would be completely functional as well as beautifully fresh and attractive.

A self-service bar for packaged merchandise is located near the front of the store with bandeau bras, soft girdles and pantie girdles next on display. Two counters with pull up chairs provide a convenient place to show merchandise. The cozy customers' lounge is provided with a drinking fountain and adjoining powder room.

There are six private fitting rooms . . . two equipped with specially designed fitting tables . . . all with full length mirrors and carpeted floors. The stockroom directly back of the fitting rooms is well lighted and the alteration corner is located here.

A full time receptionist-cashier greets each customer and schedules fitting assignments. The color scheme of the shop is a soothing blend of



Street View—Effective Window Displays benefit from the maximum use of plate glass.

gray and white with accents of Mecca yellow and turquoise. It is air conditioned for year 'round comfort and music is piped in throughout the customer area.

In moving to the street level in the heart of downtown Kansas City we expected to substantially increase sales of style garments. In addition to realizing this gain in the few months we have operated the new shop, we find that prescription sales have increased as well.

While this article deals primarily with surgical supports for women, the men's department has also shown a healthy growth through the years and continues to meet a need in our community. Surgical supports for men are fitted on the second floor, as are all prosthetic and orthopedic appliances.

It is our opinion that a surgical support department is closely allied to the orthopedic appliance department and that by employing the same principles of operating you can be assured of successfully promoting a profitable surgical support department.

Before venturing into this new field we suggest that you ask doctor friends if there is a store in your community which now offers a first-class surgical support service. Try to obtain a commitment that they will send patients to you if you should open such a department. Inquire also about the type, and brand name of the supports they prefer. The answers to this modest market research will guide your decision as to the profit potential of expanding your service to include surgical supports.



Mrs. Dillard

Lorraine Isle Dillard has been called the "stay-at-home partner" who with Ted Smith and Lee Fawver form the active partnership team operating the W. E. Isle and Knit-Rite Companies.

Daughter of the late "Billy" and Anna Isle, she grew up with this business, beginning her career in 1926. From the time the surgical support department was started it has been her special interest and responsibility. This article is drawn from her extensive experience in working with doctors, fitting patients, and managing this department.

WHAT'S NEW(S)

The Easter Seal Research Foundation of the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults provides grants-in-aid for investigations concerned with the prevention and treatment of physical and associated disabilities, and the rehabilitation of the physically handicapped. Disabilities may be congenital or may result from accident or illness.

Funds for research grants are derived from a fixed percentage of the gross returns of the annual Easter Seal campaign conducted by the National Society and its state and local affiliates.

The Foundation is concerned with investigations of (1) the causes of crippling, (2) the prevention of physical disabilities, (3) methods for improving impaired functions or for mitigating the results of dysfunction, and (4) measures for enhancing the effectiveness of the rehabilitation process. Research projects may involve basic or clinical research or both.

The Foundation invites applications for grants-in-aid. Applications filed between September 1 and March 31 are reviewed in June. Applications filed between April 1 and August 31 are reviewed in November. Awards are announced during the months of June and November. Inquiries should be addressed to William Gellman, Director of the Easter Seal Research Foundation, National Society for Crippled Children and Adults, 11 South La Salle St., Chicago 3, Ill.

Dr. R. Plato Schwartz, internationally known orthopedic surgeon who has been a member of the University of Rochester Medical School faculty since 1926, will become emeritus professor of orthopedic surgery on July 1.

Dr. Schwartz, whose pioneering studies on human locomotion have won medals from the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgery and the American Congress of Physical Therapy, will continue to direct the Medical School Gait Laboratory's broad program of research in normal and abnormal walking, neuromuscular dysfunction and proper adjustment of foot gear for corrective purposes.

Dr. Schwartz initiated the investigation of human locomotion in 1926 and is credited with devising and perfecting the oscillographic (electrical impulse) method of recording gait.