INTRODUCTION
In 2006 we conducted an online survey aimed at soliciting opinions from the prosthetics and orthotics (P&O) community regarding the direction that research in the field of P&O should take over the next 5-10 years (Fatone & Gard 2007). We re-surveyed the P&O community to assess changes that may have occurred in the intervening years. The primary objective of these surveys was to provide ongoing discourse regarding clinically relevant research.

METHOD
Subjects: Prosthetics and orthotics community.

Apparatus: The survey contained 46 questions spanning four sections, including demographics (4 questions), resources (1 question), research (18 questions), and evidence statements (21 questions).

Procedures: The survey was available online from January 29 to March 11, 2012 and was advertised on the oandp-l and amp-l list servers.

Data Analysis: Frequency of responses to different answer options for each question were compiled.

RESULTS
377 individuals responded to the survey with an average response rate for each question of 81.3%. The majority of respondents were between 30 and 59 years of age (78%) and identified themselves as certified prosthetists, orthotists or prosthetist/orthotists (60%). Almost all respondents thought that research was important (93.4%), with 79.9% of respondents indicating that the amount of P&O research was lacking and 61.2% of respondents indicating that the emphasis of P&O research was lacking.

About half of the respondents indicated that insufficient funding prevents more P&O research from being conducted (53.7%). 68% of respondents indicated they had not participated in or conducted research and 75% of respondents answered “yes” when asked if they could identify areas where research is needed but lacked the ability or resources to carry out that research.

When asked to rank the top five areas where research should be directed, outcome measures were identified as the most important category in need of future research for both P&O. Other top categories for orthotics were ankle foot orthoses and fabrication/materials, while for prosthetics it was socket/interface and control of the prosthesis.

Most respondents ranked clinical colleagues as the most important resource for guiding their role in P&O. Academic journals, where most research is first reported, were ranked 5th most important after colleagues, continuing education and national professional organizations.

DISCUSSION
Many of the questions on the 2012 survey were consistent with those administered in 2006. Our 2012 survey attracted more respondents than in 2006, although as a percentage of oandp-l subscribers, response rate remained the same (6%). The increase in number of respondents was likely due to an increase in the number of persons subscribed to oandp-l (5462 vs. 3300). Overall, the 2012 and 2006 cohorts were very similar in terms of age and association with P&O.

The proportion of respondents who thought that research was important was largely unchanged since 2006, but the proportion of respondents who believed that the amount of P&O research was lacking decreased by 18%. Similarly, the proportion of respondents who thought that the emphasis of P&O research was lacking decreased by 16%. Taken together, these results suggest that the amount and appropriateness of research focused on P&O was perceived to have improved over the last five years.

Perceptions of research funding also improved. There was a 21% decrease in respondents who believed that insufficient funding prevented more P&O research from being conducted. In contrast, the number of respondents indicating that they had not participated in or conducted research increased by 14%. Three-quarters of respondents in both cohorts answered “yes” when asked if they could identify areas where research is needed but lacked the ability or resources to carry out that research. Although funding may not be viewed as limiting P&O research generally, other factors seem to be constraining participation in research by certified prosthetists and orthotists.

When asked to rank the top five areas where research should be directed, the topics identified as most important were virtually identical between the two surveys.

CONCLUSION
While there has been modest improvement in the perception of amount and appropriateness of research and availability of funding, it appears that the need for outcome measures in P&O has not yet been met.

REFERENCES

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