



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
ORTHOPAEDIC SURGEONS

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February 23, 2016

Senator Johnny Isakson
US Senate
131 Russell
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Richard Blumenthal
US Senate
Hart 724
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Blumenthal:

On behalf of the American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS), which represents over 18,000 board-certified orthopaedic surgeons, and the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society (AOFAS), which represents over 2,200 orthopaedic surgeons specializing in foot and ankle disorders, we would like to express our concerns regarding S. 2175, Department of Veterans Affairs Provider Equity Act.

The bill essentially will enable podiatrists (DPM) to be placed on the same level as doctors of medicine (MD) and osteopathy (DO) within the Veterans Affairs VA medical system. Furthermore, it makes podiatrists eligible for the very same leadership positions such as Chief of Surgery or Chief of Staff that are now reserved for highly qualified MD or DO specialist physicians. As you are aware, complex foot and ankle injuries and the long term aftercare of sequelae of the wounds of war sustained by many of our veterans are provided at DoD facilities. The standard of care should be the same in VA facilities. There are distinct differences between an orthopaedic surgeon and a podiatrist in terms of average academic credentials required to be admitted to medical school vs podiatry school; training standards, training rigor and length, independent board certification, skills developed and demonstrated, scope of practice from state licensing boards, and credentials. This would create a lesser standard of care for our veterans in VA facilities, when they deserve the higher standard that they receive in DoD and civilian facilities.

The distal lower extremity including the foot, ankle and leg is one of the most complex areas of the human musculoskeletal system. A board certified orthopaedic surgeon specializing in foot and ankle surgery will have attended 4 years of medical school after college, a 5 year orthopaedic surgery residency and likely an additional year of subspecialty fellowship training. Podiatrists attend podiatry college and have 0-3 years of residency training with relatively limited exposure to the comprehensive educational path of an orthopaedic surgeon - and in some cases little exposure to ankle surgery.

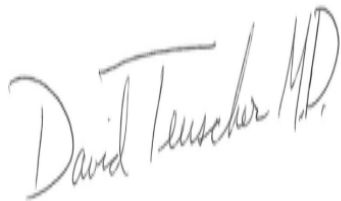
Podiatric education and training today remains variable, and a number of boards certify in specific areas of podiatry with standards that continue to evolve. The varying requirements have resulted in a range of limited licensed practitioners with varied training and skills. An orthopaedic surgeon has a better understanding of the entire body, as well as medical conditions that may affect the patient's overall health. This includes the ability to take care of post-traumatic arthritis and injury to the knee and hip which is commonly encountered in these injuries, providing continuity of care instead of a fragmented system of multiple doctors treating the same patient. We believe it is of utmost importance that our veterans receive the highest quality of care they deserve, especially with so many having returned from Iraq and Afghanistan with these complex lower limb injuries.

Finally, although we have highlighted some of the significant differences in Doctor of Podiatric Medicine (DPM) versus MD/DO, there is a place for the DPM on the healthcare team, but it is a limited role in all respects and should remain so unless future education and certification standards are elevated to the same unified standard that now exists for MD and DO and the American Council on Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery (ABOS), and the American Osteopathic Board of Orthopaedic Surgery (AOBOS),

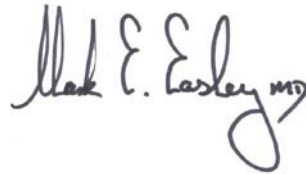
As you know, Congressman Brad Wenstrup, DPM (R-OH) introduced similar legislation (H.R. 3016), which passed the House on February 9. We understand the Veterans Affairs Committee will consider his bill. We urge you on behalf of our veterans to consider our concerns before moving forward with adoption.

Please feel free to contact Julia Williams, Senior Manager, AAOS Office of Government Relations, at (202) 548-4149 or JWilliams@AAOS.org if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,



David D. Teuscher, MD
President
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons



Mark Easley, MD
President
American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society

Cc:
Senator Jon Tester
Karen Hackett, CAE, AAOS Chief Executive Officer
William Shaffer, MD, AAOS Medical Director