

Podiatric Medicine: A Primer for Policymakers

Doctors of Podiatric Medicine

Doctors of podiatric medicine are physicians and surgeons qualified by their education and training to diagnose and treat conditions affecting the lower extremity, i.e., the foot, ankle, and where appropriate, muscles, tissues, and bones of the leg. Podiatrists are the only doctors to receive specialized medical training and board certification solely in the care of the foot and ankle.

Given its specialization, podiatric medicine is to the foot and ankle what ophthalmology is to the eye or cardiology is to the heart. The federal government and majority of states recognize doctors of podiatric medicine as physicians. The American Podiatric Medical Association believes that this should be the standard for all states.

Doctors of podiatric medicine are authorized to practice podiatric medicine by state statute and are regulated and licensed to practice podiatric medicine in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Although the podiatric scope of practice statute varies from state to state, all states permit treatment of the human foot, while 44 states and D.C. also permit treatment at or above the ankle.

Podiatric Medical Education

Doctors of podiatric medicine receive basic and clinical science education and training comparable to that of medical doctors. Similar to doctors of medicine, doctors of podiatric medicine complete four years of undergraduate and four years of podiatric medical education followed by a three year

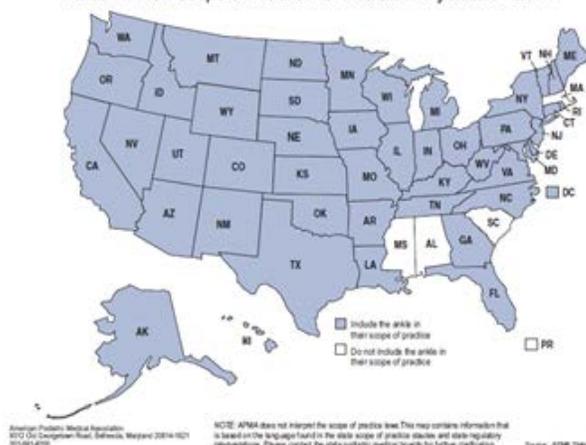
postgraduate hospital-based residency program.

The significant difference between the educational training models of medical doctors and podiatrists is that podiatric medical education begins to focus on the specialty area in the first year of the educational process. Additionally, the podiatric medical curriculum integrates basic science education with clinical education specific to lower extremity anatomy.

The first two years of podiatric medical education parallel those of allopathic medical students—podiatric medical students receive extensive instruction which includes anatomy, biochemistry, pathology, and pharmacology.

During the third- and fourth-year clinical rotations, podiatric medical students learn how to perform general and podiatric

Forty-Six States and the District of Columbia Include the Ankle in Their Scope of Practice for Podiatric Physicians—2014



physical examinations, interpret test results, make diagnoses, and perform therapeutic procedures, including surgery, in accredited hospitals, clinics, and private practice settings.

Postgraduate Residency Training

After graduating from a podiatric medical school, podiatric medical doctors enroll in one of approximately 211 health-care institutions that are approved sponsors of podiatric medical residency programs. The residency program provides training resources that facilitate the resident's sequential and progressive achievement of demonstrated competency in medical and surgical management.

During residency programs, podiatrists receive advanced training in podiatric medicine and surgery and take part in clinical rotations in anesthesiology, internal medicine, pathology, radiology, emergency medicine, and orthopedic and general surgery with a major emphasis placed on patient diagnosis and management in both inpatient and outpatient settings.

Unlike orthopedic residency training that does not universally require a commitment to foot and ankle medical and surgical management, podiatric residency programs must meet minimum requirements for training that includes hundreds of patient diagnoses, foot and ankle procedures, and case management.

With the requisite education and training, like other physicians, podiatrists can:

- Perform comprehensive medical history and physical examinations
- Prescribe drugs and order and perform physical therapy
- Perform basic and complex reconstructive surgery

- Repair fractures and treat sports-related injuries
- Prescribe and fit orthotics, insoles, and custom-made shoes
- Perform and interpret X-rays and other imaging studies

Podiatric Medicine in the Community

Our growing population increasingly requires the skills of podiatrists. Podiatric medical colleges, residency programs, and other training opportunities continue to prepare doctors of podiatric medicine for the growing epidemics of diabetes and obesity and their concurrent complications. Medical specialists in primary care, endocrinology, rheumatology, vascular, and geriatrics routinely refer patients to podiatrists.

In classrooms, clinics, and hospitals, podiatrists are trained to detect early warning signs, and diagnose and treat medical consequences of diseases, such as diabetes, poor circulation, heart and other chronic conditions that tend to manifest symptoms in the lower extremity.

The podiatric medical profession has been successful in evaluating the health care needs of the public against the backdrop of medical advancement, patient safety, and cost and efficiency in the delivery of health care. These are among the many reasons why podiatrists are essential members of America's health-care team.

For more information about podiatric medicine and scope of practice laws, contact, APMA State Advocacy at: advocacy@apma.org or at 301-581-9200.