

Podiatric Medicine: A Factsheet for Policymakers

About Doctors of Podiatric Medicine

Doctors of podiatric medicine are podiatric physicians and surgeons, also known as podiatrists, qualified by their education, training, and experience to diagnose and treat conditions affecting the foot, ankle, and related structures of the leg.

- Podiatric medicine is to the foot and ankle what ophthalmology is to the eye, cardiology is to the heart, or otolaryngology is to the ear, nose, and throat.
- Although a podiatrist's scope of practice can vary from state to state, all states permit treatment of the foot, while 44 states and D.C. permit treatment at or above the ankle.
- Within the field of podiatric medicine and surgery, podiatrists can focus on specialty areas such as surgery, sports medicine, biomechanics, geriatrics, pediatrics, orthopedics, or primary care.
- Doctors of podiatric medicine have the education, training, and experience to:
 - 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 Medical Education

- Doctors of podiatric medicine receive basic and clinical science education and training comparable to that of medical doctors:
 - Four years of undergraduate education focusing on life sciences
 - Four years of graduate study in one of the nine podiatric medical colleges
 - Three years of postgraduate, hospital-based residency training
- The education, training, and experience podiatrists receive in the care and treatment of the lower extremity is more sophisticated and specialized than that of broadly trained medical-subspecialists.

Podiatric Medicine in the Community

- Doctors of podiatric medicine service patients alongside medical doctors in hospitals and long-term facilities, on the faculties of schools of medicine, as commissioned officers in the armed forces and the US Public Health Service, in the Department of Veterans Affairs, and in municipal health departments.