



American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons

THE EDUCATION, TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION OF ACFAS PODIATRIC FOOT AND ANKLE SURGEONS July 2008

Medical and surgical care of the foot, ankle and related lower leg structures is mainly provided by two different groups in the United States: Doctors of Podiatric Medicine (DPM); and Orthopedic Doctors of Allopathy (MD) or Osteopathy (DO). This document will serve to explain the education, training and certification process of American board of Podiatric Surgery (ABPS) certified Podiatric Foot and Ankle Surgeons.

BOARD CERTIFIED PODIATRIC FOOT AND ANKLE SURGEONS

American Board of Podiatric Surgery-Certified Podiatric Foot and Ankle Surgeons are physicians specifically trained to diagnose and treat the foot, ankle and related lower leg structures. They are an integral part of the health care team, and combined with all other podiatric physicians, currently treat the majority of foot related medical issues in the U.S. Orthopedists are the second largest providers of foot related medical issues.¹

THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING DIFFERENCE

Each ABPS Board Certified Podiatric Foot and Ankle Surgeon has:

- **Completed four years of Podiatric Medical School.** Identical in length to Allopathic Medical Schools, the Podiatric Medical School curriculum covers basic and clinical sciences, including, but not limited to, general anatomy, pathology, biochemistry, pharmacology, general medicine, surgery, pediatrics, behavioral sciences and ethics. Unlike Medical and Osteopathic Schools, the Podiatric Medical School curriculum also provides intense foot, ankle and lower leg “specialty” specific education beginning in the first year.
- **Passed the National Board of Podiatric Medical Examiners national standardized licensing examination.** Comparable to the USMLE national licensing exams taken by Medical Doctors (MDs) and Osteopathic Doctors (DOs), the NBPME Podiatric Licensing Exam tests knowledge specific to foot, ankle and lower leg care as well as general medical knowledge. The USMLE tests general medical knowledge only without concentration in any one specialty.

¹ Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

- Completed post-graduate Podiatric Surgical Residency Training program.** Similar to, and often integrated with residencies for MDs and DOs, Podiatric Surgical Residency programs provide training in general medicine, general surgery and surgical specialties. The critical difference, though, is in the volume of cases and time spent in foot, ankle and lower leg specific training. Podiatric Surgical Residency Programs provide significantly more foot, ankle and lower leg training than any other specialty. While current Podiatric Residency models range from two to four years, the majority of graduates complete three years of podiatric surgical training.² A minimum of 18 months of foot, ankle and lower leg specific rotations are required to successfully complete these residencies. In contrast, general orthopedic residencies may provide as little as six weeks of foot and ankle specific rotations, with the majority doing 12 weeks or less.³ The average three-year trained Podiatric Surgery resident graduates having performed more than 500 foot, ankle and lower leg surgical procedures,⁴ while the average five-year trained general Orthopedic Resident graduates have only performed 300 foot, ankle and lower leg procedures.⁵ Furthermore, multiple general orthopedic resident surveys have shown that graduating general orthopedic surgeons feel their program was deficient in foot and ankle surgery and that they are least prepared to treat the foot and ankle upon entering private practice.⁶

THE BOARD CERTIFICATION DIFFERENCE

Podiatric Foot and Ankle Surgeons certified by the American Board of Podiatric Surgery (ABPS) have successfully completed an intense board certification process comparable to that undertaken by individual MD and DO specialties. Certification by the ABPS involves written and oral examinations, in addition to submission of surgical case logs.

Prerequisites for board qualified status in foot and ankle surgery require successful completion of a three-year podiatric surgical program and passage of the written examination. Prerequisites for board certified status in foot and ankle surgery require successful passage of the written examination in addition to submission of more than 100 surgical cases of varying complexity for critical review, a minimum of five years clinical experience and successful passage of the oral examination. Additionally, diplomates must re-certify every 10 years to maintain their board-certified status.

The critical differences between Board Certified Podiatric Foot and Ankle Surgeons and Board Certified Orthopedists are:

- The ABPS certification process involves testing specific to the foot and ankle. One hundred percent of the written board certification examination in Podiatric Surgery is relevant to the foot, ankle and lower leg. Less than five percent of the

² Council for Podiatric Medical Education (CPME).

³ Pinzur et al., 2003; *Foot & Ankle International* (24) 567-569.

⁴ CPME Document 320, 2005.

⁵ Numbers from ACGME 2007 resident caseload report.

⁶ Dailey, et al., August 1998; *American Journal of Orthopedics* 563-570.

American Board of Orthopedic Surgery (ABOS) certification examination is specific to the foot and ankle.

- The ABPS certification process involves proving experience specifically in the performance of foot and ankle surgical procedures, whereas the ABOS does not.
- The ABPS certification process certifies physicians, specifically in Foot and Ankle Surgery. There is no Foot and Ankle specific certification process for Orthopedic Surgeons.

THE PRACTICE DIFFERENCE

- Board Certified Podiatric Foot and Ankle Surgeons and Orthopedists are both credentialed by hospitals, surgery centers, medical centers and educational institutions by a standardized process specified by the Joint Commission. This standardized process mandates minimum requirements that both groups must meet or exceed and defines the process for an equitable peer review process. This process, however, may not require Board-certified Orthopedists to demonstrate any special skills or training in foot and ankle surgery, whereas Podiatric Foot and Ankle Surgeons must demonstrate training and experience specific to the foot and ankle to obtain privileges.
- Board Certified Podiatric Foot and Ankle Surgeons exclusively limit their practice to the care of the foot, ankle and lower leg, whereas the majority of general orthopedists treat a multitude of musculoskeletal complaints throughout the entire body.
- Board Certified Podiatric Foot and Ankle Surgeons and Orthopedists are both required to attend Continuing Medical Education (CME) courses on a yearly basis to maintain state licensure. Only Podiatric Foot and Ankle Surgeons are required to attend foot and ankle specific courses, whereas orthopedists may complete their CME requirement entirely in areas outside the foot and ankle.