

Are You Lost for a Career Choice?

What occupation should you follow?

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This article is aimed at school pupils, career teachers and all school and sixth form colleges with the aim to help students looking for a healthcare career in podiatry. It's tough to decide when there are so many options. The choices within podiatry are wider than people realise and not to be mistaken for a role dealing with an isolated part of the body. The foot is linked to the whole body frame and the frame is reliant on healthy body organs. Below you will find an overview of the career opportunities offered in this wonderful profession

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT PODIATRY

- How to find a podiatrist for work experience? <https://rcpod.org.uk>
- Which university to select? <https://www.studyin-uk.in/study-guide/study-podiatry-uk/>
- Salaries & grading NHS <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/working-health/working-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates/agenda-change-pay-rates>

Selecting Podiatry

There are 2 assumptions: First, you are interested in a health career with an emphasis on science and maybe biology. The second assumption is that you want a career – one that is more than a job, one that is enjoyable, one that provides a good income, one that is flexible and one that ideally provides you with stability for life.

Maybe you want an opportunity to teach, undertake research and study for a doctorate. Lead a team, become a clinical manager, run a business, work with a football team, a dance centre, develop skills in sports medicine or work with the law. The opportunity to travel, to speak internationally or internationally, or become an authoritative writer are all choices open within the profession of podiatry.

A Job for life?

Many professions offer some if not all of these benefits i.e. a job for life and those mentioned above. Podiatry overlaps with medicine, physiotherapy and even dentistry. What makes podiatry unique is the opportunity to be autonomous and yet work with a team of different health care professionals. You can work part-time, between the NHS and the independent sector (private practice) or work for companies. The current qualification of Bachelor of Science degree (BSc) can open doors. Advanced training with a Master's degree will allow you to become a consultant podiatric surgeon or lead to research or teaching, enable you to gain a PhD (doctorate) and maybe a professorship in a university. Podiatry (podiatric medicine) can offer all of this, motivating its members to reach their full potential. The most important fact for the school leaver is that you can do well and be your own boss.

While no-one expects a job for life these days, the skills you accrue with training will persuade you more than anything that you can sink a life's investment into this profession. Nothing comes without effort and no profession will make you rich instantly or elevate you above a certain amount of routine work. Rewards in healthcare are returned through job satisfaction and improving the quality of people's lives and that of your own. If there is a desire to go to work and the job feels more like a hobby than a 9-5 role, then passion is clearly felt – podiatry can offer this. Fifty years has brought about extensive changes to the role of the podiatrist once considered little more than pedicure. The profession has a strong medical role and a good career structure with a commensurate income.

A Landscape of Opportunity

Like a flying carpet from the Arabian Knights, I was transformed along a landscape that threw up opportunities; it was like an uncharted journey, unlike today where destiny has a better outline for progression. Like many, I left school uncertain as to my future. Our career officer provided all the usual subject careers, but podiatry was not discussed. By chance I was redirected to a profession I loved and still do to this day after 40+ years. From the many stories that I have listened to it was the same; colleagues entered the profession often by chance and dissatisfied with their own first choice only to take a brave step and alter their direction.

All universities offer places for mature students but for the school leaver, podiatry is often left out as an option. The earning potential varies depending upon the role and how much you want to work – part-time is popular when bringing up families. In the NHS the starting grade is usually Band 5, sometimes Band 6 and can progress to Band 8-9 where pay is equivalent to some senior medical and consultant grades. In the

independent sector you can mix industrial work with private and NHS, where contracts exist, the salaries can rise to over £100,000.

Podiatry is a Medical Subject

Podiatrists are medically trained but are not medical doctors. Learning the language of medical practice is essential. We need to communicate professionally and achieve technical accuracy. Our actions must follow a valid set of concepts laid down by medical practice, whether providing medications, arranging an x-ray or blood test, giving a local anaesthetic or making a surgical incision.

A podiatrist is a health professional and therefore must have a passion for helping people improve their quality of health. Every health professional, in their way, is an educator. We have to learn intricate details and workings of the body from muscle contractions to the mechanics of joints that help the body move. The organs that make up the various systems from sensation of the skin, to breathing, from pumping blood to digesting food and excreting waste; all are important for health. One of the primary roles that podiatrists provide is preserving the skin structure within the lower limb, preventing pressure exacting harm, knowing about footwear manufacture and design, common skin diseases and healing. Since the start of undergraduate degree courses (c.1990) the level of applied science has increased.

Educational elements of health & social impacts required for podiatry

FUNCTIONAL ELEMENT	SOCIAL ELEMENT
Blood pressure	Weight gain or loss
Renal & bowel cancer	Nutrition
Thyroid & pancreatic function (endocrine)	Alcohol
Cardiac and respiratory efficiency	Smoking & exercise
Skin and keratin relationship	Healing and injury
Neuromuscular function & joint health	Mental disease & depression
Blood flow and organ failure	Cancer & disease (family)

Podiatry deals with the whole not the part

It may surprise many that podiatry is not seen just as a profession looking after feet. In each case we can screen for general health and look out for suspicious cancers, swellings, mental health changes, self-harming and domestic abuse. The contribution to health care as a multidisciplinary professional provides significant support to the primary care service – the GP and then the secondary services through other teams in the community or hospitals. While age plays a part in some of these areas, there is a case for treating specific categories differently. For example, providing care for seniors allows us to maintain mobility and prevent falls. The image of dealing with the older section of the population alone misrepresents the full panoply associated with the broader scope of this foot health professional. We deal with babies, to the old aged and infirm, those with mental or physical disability to those who are able but injured through sport or hobbies. Pain is at the heart of our focus; the aim to maintain functional mobility within our society. Over the last half century new techniques offer wider treatment methods from medication to laser, microwave, ultrasound, cryotherapy and extra corporeal shock wave.

Research & Communication

We have learned the new language of research and can now contribute to evidence based medicine. Translating complex language is a role that is important from degree level and beyond so the least educated person can understand what treatments are best for them. We embrace Latin, Greek and French which make up parts of the English language in medicine and translate this to a level of easy comprehension. Why is the *os tibiale externum* important in the foot? We have to be scientists and communicators as well as clinicians all woven into one occupation. Anatomy is studied in detail from the lower limb to the upper body and brain.

Working in clinical practice

Most who go into podiatry want to treat people. We are a people profession. Face to face contacts offer a variety of opportunities. For the most part people are decent, receptive and want to follow your advice. Working in modern environments mean being employed by the NHS in a health centre of hospital department, setting up your own practice and equipping this or working as an assistant or associate with an established firm of podiatrists. House calls are still carried out - known as

domiciliary, and some podiatrists specialise in this service visiting private houses, nursing and residential homes supporting care workers and nursing staff.

Armed forces and prisons

Unlike the USA, the UK armed forces do not have a dedicated career structure, but podiatrists provide care for our servicemen in their own practices. HM Prisons do offer contracts and podiatrists visit prisons under strict security.

Extended Scope Practitioners

Podiatrists work with physiotherapists in multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) and provide a comprehensive service in some private hospital settings. In the NHS the service has become risk focused on disease and the traditional care for the elderly has reduced significantly. Diabetes, rheumatology, orthopaedics and podiatric surgery now form the main platform for podiatric delivery. Podiatrists working in MDTs perform triage for surgery and are often graded at a higher level, known as extended scope practitioners (ESPs). The introduction of independent prescribing (IP) is currently achieved after qualifying and many podiatrists are enabled to provide medicines once only provided by medical doctors.

Industrial consultancy & commercial outlets

Specialised outlets from dance schools to football clubs now embrace podiatry where once physiotherapy dominated. Sports podiatry and medicine form another option for career development with active courses around the UK.

Podiatry is unique amongst other professions. As well as learning about the theory of podiatric medicine and surgery, practical skills can lead to manufacturing appliances from orthoses to prostheses. Acquiring good motor skills is essential for all podiatry. Two examples of enterprise came about in 1980s: A. Paul Barcroft set up Langer (UK) to provide a quality orthotic prescription service for podiatrists, while Clive Over set up OVA instruments selling a wide range of products for the podiatry industry. Independent podiatrists have been creative - setting up gait analysis laboratories, business advisory and communication services.

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The potential for expanding commerce has never been better. Podiatrists work for companies such as Capita and Circle Health care agencies, Shuropody and Scholl to mention a few.

Law and the Courts

The legal side of podiatry has grown with expert witness work and forensic podiatry assisting lawyers and barristers as well as the courts. Maturity and clinical experience are essential as a number have to attend court under cross examination. The study of walking and gait evaluation is taught at all universities but to take this to a specialist level requires more qualification.

Post-graduate careers

All the previously mentioned outlets can lead to inspiring careers, but podiatric surgery is the only dedicated career that has an extended training system. The career commences after graduation and taking a Master's degree in podiatric surgery. The course held in a recognised University (currently Huddersfield) is validated by the Health Care and Professions Council which hold a register for all those who are now qualifying in this specialty. The length of time to qualify, gaining a Fellowship in podiatric surgery, is usually 7-8 years depending on locating a placement in an NHS hospital. All consultants today must complete their certificate of completion as registrars which is a further 2-3-year period of part- or full-time paid employment under a registered tutor and consultant. The grades of employment are usually at AFC Grade 8+. Upon qualifying, podiatric surgeons often work in the independent sector.

All podiatrists are able to practice minor surgery, but only podiatric surgeons offer bone and joint procedures. The field of surgery today is extensive and includes reconstructive work following chronic injury, deformity, diabetes and rheumatological diseases.

Podiatry offers a transforming career with many opportunities for men and women, for part-time and full-time employment. Clinical contact work to clinical teaching and university teaching to research.

Speak to your local podiatrist, or find more information on my site www.consultingfootpain.co.uk or use the Royal College of Podiatry website <https://rcpod.org.uk>.