



## Podiatrist or Orthopaedic Surgeon?

Podiatrists and Orthopaedic Surgeons both treat and perform surgery on the foot and ankle. However, there are definite differences in their training that patients should be aware of.

**Orthopaedic Surgeons** complete a 4-year medical school curriculum, which leads to an MD or DO degree. Following medical school, they usually perform up to a five-year orthopaedic residency, where they are trained in all aspects of orthopaedic surgery including hand, wrist, shoulder, hip, knee, ankle & foot surgery. They also complete additional rotations in Anesthesiology, Emergency medicine, Internal medicine, Pathology and Radiology. Surgeons who have a special interest in Foot & Ankle Surgery may complete an additional one-year fellowship.

**Podiatrists** complete a 4-year podiatry school curriculum, which leads to a DPM (Doctor of Podiatric Medicine) degree. During the final two years of podiatry school, students perform clinical rotations in private practices, hospitals, and clinics focusing on foot & ankle problems. Following podiatry school, they usually perform a 1- to 3-year podiatric residency, where they are trained in all aspects of foot & ankle pathology. They also complete additional rotations in Anesthesiology, Emergency medicine, Internal medicine, Pathology and Radiology.

### So what is the difference?

A recent study by the Resident Education Committee of the American Orthopaedic Foot & Ankle Society initiated a survey of Orthopaedic Surgery Residencies in the United States. (1) They found that the majority of orthopaedic residents experienced an average of 12 weeks dedicated to foot & ankle training, whereas eighteen of the 148 programs actually had 20-24 weeks of foot & ankle training. The majority of the Orthopaedic Surgery Residencies had only one faculty member dedicated to foot & ankle training. As noted above, some Orthopaedic Surgeons choose to participate in a one-year foot & ankle fellowship where they spend the year treating foot & ankle pathology.

Podiatrists, on the other hand, spend over half of their final two years of podiatry school focusing on specific foot & ankle conditions. In addition, one-year Podiatric Residencies focus at least half the year on foot & ankle conditions, while Three-Year Podiatric Residencies focus over 2 years (104 weeks) on dedicated foot & ankle training by multiple podiatric and orthopaedic surgeons.

**Dr. Gonzalez** completed a Three-Year Podiatric Surgical Residency at a Level-1 trauma center in downtown Chicago (Illinois Masonic Medical Center). He is trained in all aspects of foot & ankle surgery, including conservative and surgical management. He recommends that patients inquire as to the amount of training of any foot & ankle surgeon prior to undergoing any surgery. As patients rely on their feet for everything they do, **Dr. Gonzalez** recommends that patients consider having surgery performed by experienced foot & ankle surgeons, who are either Board Certified by the American Board of Podiatric Surgery or are members of the American College of Foot & Ankle Surgeons or the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society.

**Dr. Gonzalez** is Board Certified in Foot Surgery by the American Board of Podiatric Surgeons and is a Fellow of the American College of Foot & Ankle Surgeons.

(1) Pinzur MD, Mikolyzk D, Aronow MS, DiGiovanni BF, Mizel MS, Pinney SJ, Saltzman CL, and Temple T. Foot and Ankle Experience in Orthopaedic Residency. Foot & Ankle International 24(7):pp 567-569, 2003.

