

Profession: Podiatry

Roles and Responsibilities of the Professional

Podiatrists are the part of the health care team that specialises in the lower limb, including the hips, knees, ankles and feet. All aspects of walking are considered, with the ability to prescribe insoles that adjust how the foot functions when there is an abnormal or painful gait.

When clients have limited mobility or access to their feet, the Podiatrist is able to provide a nail cutting or reduction provision, alongside treatments of corns and callus using scalpels and filing. However, skills also extend to the treatment of fungal, viral and bacterial infections of the skin and nails, with footwear and self-care advice, and the off-loading of pressure points which are causing pain.

The podiatrist role merges with that of the community nurse in the managing of foot infections and dressing lesions. The role includes aspects of physiotherapy in its treatment of sports and over-use injuries for the active adult, which may be more muscle, tendon or ligament related. There are also aspects of paediatrics and developmental stages, when considering toddlers' stumbling and tripping.

Modern Perspective

Podiatrists have a key role in multi-disciplinary teams that work with chronic conditions such as diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis. As such, you are helping to manage inflammatory and degenerative conditions which may cause ulceration of the skin and deep infections, or the destruction of joints within the foot.

Podiatrists in the UK may choose to work within the National Health Service (NHS), where they receive the support of fellow practitioners and allied health professionals. They may also invest time and effort in Private Practice as owner-practitioners, with the freedoms and responsibilities of running a small business. Both are highly rewarding, with some podiatrists moving between the two. Whilst most Podiatrists work in a clinical setting, many also have domiciliary rounds where they treat less mobile clients in their own homes, or in care settings.

Modern Podiatrists may choose to extend their practice into areas such as foot surgery, injection therapies using ultrasound techniques, screening for skin cancer and the treatment of chronic pain using acupuncture.

Life Long Journey

Podiatry may be chosen as a first career or as a re-training choice in mid-life (as exemplified by the number of mature students involved). Many students qualify for NHS bursaries which cover all tuition fees and half of student living expenses; such is the demand for newly qualified podiatrists. Qualification as a UK Podiatrist requires completion of a three year university degree, including 1,000 hours of supervised clinical practise.

Podiatry in the UK is regulated by the Health Professions Council, with a requirement for regular updating of clinical and practice skills through Continuous Professional Development. Membership of the Society of Chiropractors and Podiatrists or similar provides professional insurance cover, as well as local branch training, support and socialisation.