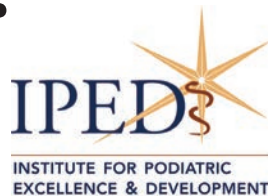




Podiatrists Prevent Diabetic Amputations: Spread the Word!

Use the Internet to tell patients and referrers what we do.



BY JEFFREY LEHRMAN, DPM

This article, written exclusively for PM, appears courtesy of the Institute for Podiatric Excellence and Development (IPED). IPED's mission is to motivate, inspire and synergistically bridge the gap between students, residents, new practitioners, and seasoned veterans in the field of podiatric medicine. They are committed to the idea that mentors with passion to share and mentees eager to learn make a powerful combination that allows IPED to bring and renew a full life to podiatric physicians, their practices and their well-being throughout the U.S. and beyond.

As podiatrists, we have so much to offer to potential patients with diabetes. We have knowledge, tools, and resources that can improve the quality of life for a diabetic, help diabetics avoid amputation, and actually prolong the lives of people with diabetes. Not only can we have this significant impact directly on the lives of patients with diabetes, but we can also provide significant benefits to our healthcare system in caring for patients with diabetes. The Thomson Reuters study that was co-sponsored by the American Podiatric Medical Association showed that at least one preventative pre-ulcer visit to a podiatrist by a diabetic between the ages of 18 and 64 was associated

with an approximately 29 percent lower risk of amputation and a 24 percent lower risk of hospitalization. This can translate to not only significant improvement in quality of life for our patients, but also a tremendous savings to our healthcare system. Considering that diabetic foot complications are the leading cause of non-traumatic lower limb

So how can we best communicate what we have to offer regarding care of patients with diabetes? Social media is a tremendously powerful (and free!) tool that we all have at our disposal. Seventy percent of patients do an online search for their problem before they do an online search for a doctor to treat it. What they find when they do these search-

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amputation in the United States, the findings of this study speak volumes for the power of care provided by a podiatrist.

This information is of little value if it is not shared with our communities, potential patients, and referring doctors. It is in our best interest to share this information with as many potentially interested parties as possible. This can help us to reach those in need and also improve public health. Communicating this information to decision-makers can also be a tremendously powerful practice management tool. One may even argue that we have a social responsibility to share this information with as many people as possible.

es is largely dependent on what information we, as doctors, are putting out there. Our national societies publicize information that paints us in a positive light and content that helps to educate the public as to the potential benefits of seeing a podiatrist, but the more content out there the better. If doctors are flooding social media platforms with information as well, people are more likely to find information of higher quality that drives them to appropriate treatment options.

Social tools such as Twitter, Facebook, and Google Plus are free and easy to use. In the last year, seventy-two percent of Internet users

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searched online for health information. This trend will only continue in the same direction. 94% of teenagers in our country use Facebook. If our prospective patients are not searching online for medical information themselves, their adult children are likely doing it for them.

When someone is first diagnosed with diabetes, it is likely that one of the first things they will do, if they want to learn more about it, will be to do an online search. It is important for us that when they do this search, they find content about good preventative foot care and content that drives them to a podiatrist. Finding that information could one day save their leg. If that content is created and posted by you, and that leads the patient to your office, that's excellent practice management. Not only have you gained a new patient, but you've also gained a patient who was invested in his or her own health enough to search online to learn more.

Referring doctors are reading and learning online as well. Endocrinologists, internists, family medicine doctors, and others all could potentially refer diabetics to a podiatrist. Publishing information about the impact that podiatric care can have on the lives of diabetics can help remind these doctors just how important it is to get their patients to a podiatrist. Beyond that, they have to choose a podiatrist to send their patients to. If you are the podiatrist authoring the content they are reading, and they see that you are the one educating the public, you are more likely to gain their referral.

Aside from the benefits of educating potential patients and encouraging them to visit a podiatrist, and engaging referring doctors, there are potential positives to sharing information about the impact of podiatric diabetic care to other entities as well. It is in our best interest to make every effort possible to share the value of our care with public health agencies, insurance carriers, and any potential payer. The economic impact of podiatric care is significant. The Thomson Reuters

study referenced earlier found that if every diabetic foot ulcer patient with commercial medical insurance had at least one visit to a podiatrist in the year preceding their ulceration, a savings of \$19,686 would be realized. These results were extrapolated to conclude that if all commercially insured diabetic patients with risk for developing a foot ulcer had a pre-ulcerative visit to a podiatrist, \$1.97 billion dollars could be saved by those commercial carriers in just one year.

The study also showed that similar pre-ulcerative visits by patients with Medicare would lead to a \$1.53 billion savings for Medicare in just

social media that has the ability to educate so many.

People often ask, "What do I write?" or comment that they don't have time to come up with material to write. You already have all the material! You have years of twitter posts in your head right now. Every time you see a new diabetic patient, you educate that patient about the potential lower extremity ramifications of diabetes, what they can do to try to prevent these complications, and suggest a course of action. This is likely a lesson you provide many times a day and, for some of us, a lesson we have repeating over and over for many years.

The diabetic shoe program, when done properly, offers many benefits to a podiatric practice.

one year. This information is powerful when lobbying for our rights and arguing for the importance of podiatric care. It is in our best interest to share this information with as many interested parties as possible. This is the type of information that can be shared at no cost and distributed widely using social media.

More powerful information that we can share comes from the results of the Arizona Medicaid program eliminating podiatric care for its patients. A study led by Dr. David Armstrong showed that Arizona Medicaid eliminating coverage for podiatric care led to a 50% increase in severe outcomes including amputation, sepsis, and surgical complications. Furthermore, the study found a 38% increase in hospital admissions due to diabetic foot infections, a 45% increase in charges for those admissions, and a 29% increase in length of hospital stay. In the end, the evaluation of the effect of eliminating podiatric care showed that for every dollar saved, there was a \$44 increase in cost of care. This is another example of the power of the care provided to diabetics by podiatrists, but also an example of information that can be shared online via

It may change a bit based on the patient and the situation, but it's the same general information every time. A social media post need only be a sentence or two. Twitter posts are limited to 140 characters. There are many valuable posts that you can pull right out of that introduction to diabetes talk that you give every day. Almost every day in your office a patient asks you a question about diabetes that many others may also have. Sharing that question and its appropriate answer is another trick to coming up with online content to share.

We may have recommendations for shoes for people with diabetes. Maybe you have had experiences with shoes that you have found to be positive or negative for people with diabetes. This is also information that can be shared online. This knowledge can help educate other doctors, your community, and potential patients. This is also a powerful marketing tool that can help drive patients to your office.

Some podiatrists participate in a diabetic shoe program. The diabetic shoe program, when done properly, offers many benefits to a podiatric

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practice. Most importantly, studies have shown that diabetics are less likely to develop pedal ulceration, foot infection, and go on to amputation if they are regularly wearing extra-depth diabetic shoes. This contributes to public health, better outcomes, and a better quality of life for our patients...the best type of practice management there is!

Another benefit to the diabetic shoe program is the effect that it

often they are reminded about the benefits of this service, the more likely they are to remind their qualified patients to take advantage of it and send them to you. Referring doctors learning about the benefits of a diabetic shoe program may also be useful if you are tasked with involving them in the paperwork required to allow for insurance coverage of these shoes.

If you have never used social media professionally, it is not difficult to get started. Pick one of the more popular platforms, such as Twitter or

this information shows those viewing your content that you and your podiatric colleagues are aware of the potential complications of diabetes and that you have the tools and expertise to help prevent these complications and expertly manage them should they ever arise. **PM**

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The same privacy rules that apply to every other aspect of practice apply to online content as well, so be careful to never share any private information.

can have on patient engagement. We want our patients keeping their appointments and coming in at regular intervals for diabetic foot exams. When patients are looking forward to cast for their new shoes at their next appointment, or picking up their new shoes at their next appointment, they are more likely to keep that appointment and may be more motivated to be compliant with follow-up instructions.

If you have a diabetic shoe program through your office, it is important to let the community know that you are offering this. This can attract many to your practice. Marketing materials and advertising that includes a brief description of the program can be very attractive to prospective patients and their families. "Did you know you may be entitled to a pair of custom diabetic shoes?" can grab the attention of patients and their families looking for diabetic foot care. Not only may it lead to new or increased visits to your office, this type of marketing may lead readers to engage with more of your content. This can lead them to learning even more about what your practice has to offer.

Potential referring doctors can also be educated about your diabetic shoe program via content posted online. This may allow them to learn about a wonderful service you are providing to your patients. The more

Facebook and create your professional account. A strong password is recommended as well as a professional profile photo that is a positive reflection of you and/or your practice. A brief description of you and the services you provide or a description of your practice helps readers to know whom this information is coming from. It is also recommended to provide links to your practice's website if you have one. Providing links to other social media platforms and blogs that you may have is useful as well.

The same privacy rules that apply to every other aspect of practice apply to online content as well, so be careful to never share any private information just as you would in any other area of communication. Never use patient names or identifying information and be sure to share photos and videos in HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) compliant fashion.

The studies referenced in this article prove that care by a podiatrist can decrease the incidence of diabetic foot ulceration, infection, and amputation; and considerably decrease the cost of care for a diabetic patient. This is wonderful, useful information that can be impactful to not only prospective patients and their families, but also to potential referring doctors, public health agencies, and insurance carriers. Taking care to share



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