

Boy Scouts Merit Badge and Student Recruitment

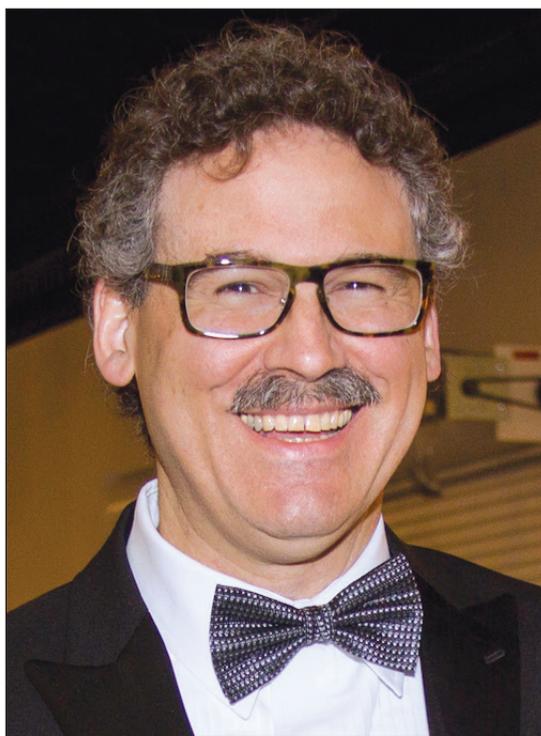
An Ohio DPM is leading a movement to involve Scouts in podiatry.

BY MARC HASPEL, DPM

One of the leading concerns in the profession of podiatric medicine is quality student recruitment.

In recent times, those in leadership have been faced with a crisis of too few applicants to the colleges of podiatric medicine, which in turn has led to a troubling low ratio of applicants to matriculating podiatric students. In response, many programs directed towards outreach and mentoring have been and continue to be established to generate interest among students in pre-medical education for podiatric medicine. Of course, different innovative ways of appealing to prospective student candidates are always welcome. One such endeavor has recently been undertaken by a determined Ohio podiatric physician. Bruce Blank, DPM, a former scout and continued supporter of the Boy Scouts of America, not long ago identified a void in representation of podiatric medicine in that organization's career-building mechanism known as the merit badge program.

This program allows Scouts to begin to show affinities for certain subjects that may help pave the way for their career choices in the future. Blank is making strides to ensure that podiatric medicine is well represented in this process, which could encourage a host of qualified candidates to the profession in the future. Blank recently took time to explain the benefit of this opportunity, and what it means for the profession.



Dr. Bruce Blank

PM: Why do you think student recruitment is an issue for the profession of podiatric medicine and surgery?

Blank: Essentially, the current recruitment process isn't working to ensure a proper ratio of applicants to available positions. I think that practicing podiatric physicians are the best source for recruiting future generations of podiatric doctors. These physicians should be inquiring about the interests of young patients. If these patients indicate an interest in science or medicine, they should be encouraged to do some research con-

cerning this profession. Podiatric physicians should offer these young people an opportunity to visit their offices to shadow them to further instill an interest in this profession. Furthermore, once students with interest reach college age, I think allowing them to observe in the operating room is also a fantastic way to introduce them to this important aspect of the field.

If each practicing podiatric physician were to recruit a single applicant, there would be thousands more applicants than currently exists. That would result in a fine benefit for the profession. Additionally, I see becoming part of the DPM Mentors Network through the American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine as an important strategy for recruiting potential applicants.

PM: What is your background with the Boy Scouts of America?

Blank: As a young man, I really enjoyed scouting. It was one of the more meaningful experiences of my youth. As a young Scout, I received the recognition of Scout of the Year from my troop. I obtained the rank of Eagle Scout, of which I am very proud. Moreover, I was a Brotherhood member of the Order of the Arrow, and a member of an Explorer Post. I worked as a camp commissioner at a Boy Scout summer camp for two summers. I joined the National Eagle Scout Association as a Life Member.

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After graduating from college, I was the Scout Master of a new troop for one year, prior to entering graduate school, followed by matriculating at The Ohio College of Podiatric Medicine, now The Kent State University College of Podiatric Medicine. Very recently, I volunteered as one of the podiatric physicians at the 2017 BSA National Jamboree.

PM: *How do organizations like the Boy Scouts of America influence decision-making in terms of life choices and career choices for young men?*

Blank: The organization has established a merit badge program to help Scouts gain experience and develop skills. Scouts can participate and develop skills in different sports and crafts. They can also learn about fields of science, trades, business, and future careers. In fact, many Scouts have chosen their careers based upon the experience they gained and the love they developed for particular areas of interest culminating in earning a merit badge in that subject.

sired of potential applicants to the profession. Personally, I would have loved to learn about podiatric medicine through a merit badge while I was in scouting. It would have allowed me to find my career at an earlier time and matriculate a few years earlier. I feel strongly that a

shared with APMA, a few podiatric medical college professors, a few deans of the colleges of podiatric medicine, and several podiatric physicians who are also Eagle Scouts.

I've been in contact with the national director of Boy Scouting, who is in charge of Pilots and Program Devel-

“My intention is to get one article, or series of articles, published in *Boys' Life* concerning foot and ankle care as well as prevention and treatment of injuries.”—Blank

new merit badge in podiatric medicine would offer scouts an awareness of this profession at an early age. One of the merit badge requirements would have to involve visiting podiatric physician offices.

Another timely reason for establishing a merit badge in podiatric medicine is related to the Boy Scouts of America's new policy of admitting girls to scouting. Today, nearly fifty percent of matriculating students are women. I think a podiatric medicine merit badge would be of interest to a

opment, and to whom the initial application was sent. I plan to visit the organization headquarters in Dallas, Texas in late July, 2018, along with Paul Kinberg, DPM, who practices in Dallas and also is an Eagle Scout.

Additionally, in a recent APMA Weekly Focus, APMA Executive Director Jim Christina, DPM, issued a call to action to Eagle Scout DPMs. He informed them that I am in the process of creating a letter in support for the podiatric medicine merit badge to be sent to the Boy Scouts. I hope to have it be signed by as many podiatric physician Eagle Scouts as possible. I've already personally been contacted by several DPMs who earned the Eagle Award, and are pleased to sign the letter of support. I invite any other podiatric physician Eagle Scouts to contact me in order to sign the letter.

Politically, Ohio Representative Bill Johnson has sent the organization a wonderful letter of support for development of a podiatric medicine merit badge. Congressman Bill Johnson is also one of the lead sponsors of the HELLPP Act bill, a major APMA initiative on behalf of the profession.

Currently, I'm also in discussions with one of the writers for *Boys' Life* Magazine. This magazine is received by all registered Scouts and Scout leaders. My intention is to get one article, or series of articles, published in *Boys' Life* concerning foot and ankle care as well as prevention and treatment of injuries.

I am aware that, annually, scouts are surveyed about subject areas

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There are merit badges in medicine, dental medicine, and veterinary medicine.

Of note, there is a first aid merit badge. There are also merit badges in medicine, dental medicine, and veterinary medicine. Naturally, I thought it would be very beneficial for Scouts to have the opportunity to complete a podiatric medicine merit badge to learn about the opportunity of a potential future career in this profession.

PM: *Why do you think establishing a merit badge in podiatric medicine and surgery would be an important pursuit?*

Blank: As laid out in Scout law, the following attributes to which scouts aspire are being: Trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent. I find that these qualities are the same ones de-

signed a significant number of both boys and girls in scouting, particularly those interested in science and medicine.

PM: *What measures have you personally taken to accomplish the establishment of a merit badge in podiatric medicine and surgery for the Scouts?*

Blank: I have already completed a Boy Scouts of America application for creation of a new merit badge in podiatric medicine. As part of the application process, I had to create proposed requirements for the new merit badge. I created the draft of merit badge requirements by using, as templates, the requirements of the previously mentioned merit badges in medicine, dental medicine, and veterinary medicine.

The draft of requirements was

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about which there may be interest in pursuing, if there were to be a new merit badge available. I hope to get podiatric medicine listed as one of the choices.

PM: *What can other DPMs do to assist in this effort to establish a merit badge?*

Blank: Again, I encourage podiatric physicians who are Eagle Scouts to contact me (bruceblankdpm@gmail.com), indicating that they would like to sign the letter of support. The goal is to obtain well over one hundred signatures. Also, they can indicate whether they would like to act as merit badge counselors for the podiatric medicine merit badge. Of course, one of the criteria the Boy Scouts of America uses involves the availability of counselors for any new merit badge.

I also welcome support from those who were involved in scouting but did not reach the rank of Eagle Scout. They, too, could volunteer as counselors for the merit badge, I think that would help tremendously. Additionally, I welcome input for content that can be published in *Boy's Life*, which can help build the case for establishing the merit badge.

Locally, those currently involved in scouting as adult leaders, or as parents of Scouts, can discuss this concept with their local Boy Scouts of America Council Leadership in hopes of getting more support for change nationally.

PM: *When do you foresee the completion of the goal of establishing a merit badge in podiatric medicine?*

Blank: During the last few years, the Boy Scouts of America has worked hard to introduce more than seventeen new merit badges into its

program, many of which were inspired by suggestions from the field. The pace of introductions of new merit badges is slowing down in order to allow Scouts to gain exposure to what is already available.

When this process of developing new merit badges starts up again, however, I know that there are already a few currently identified subject areas in place that may result in new merit badges. My current goal is to have podiatric medicine added to this short list, and to get a new merit badge for this profession instituted within a few short years. **PM**



Dr. Haspel is senior editor of this magazine and past-president of the New Jersey Podiatric Medical Society. He is a member of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management.