

April Editorial

Is Podiatry a Profession or a Medical Specialty?

As 2015 rapidly approaches, perhaps it's time for the profession to answer the fundamental question: Is podiatry a profession or a medical specialty? The answer is critical to Vision 2015's goal of achieving parity with other allopathic physicians.

We would argue that podiatric medicine is a medical specialty. Practically speaking, we are a hybrid of orthopedic surgery and dermatology. The only difference between our medical specialty and theirs is that they operate under a basically universal and unrestricted license granted through an MD degree, while we operate on a restricted license granted through our DPM. Unfortunately, unlike an MD license, our scope varies (often significantly) from state to state.

The fatal flaw in Vision 2015 is the presumption that true parity can be achieved so that MD, DO, and DPM will be treated equally. This could only be true if podiatry were an independent and autonomous profession. Would ophthalmologists or orthopedists have parity with other MDs if it had a different specialty degree instead? Do we want to be treated like optometrists or chiropractors, who each have their own degrees? We think not.

The only part of Vision 2015 with "teeth" is the concept of our students taking the identical national boards as all other allopathic or osteopathic students. This would set the stage for our acceptance in the traditional medical community.

We urge the leaders of podiatry to accept that the only way to achieve true parity is to work towards a transition from the DPM to the MD degree. Our advances in education and training have merited this change, but first we must accept that we are a medical specialty and not a profession.