

The High Cost of Being a Foot and Ankle Surgeon

BY BARRY H. BLOCK, DPM, JD

For the last few decades there has been an undeniable movement to create podiatrists who are foot and ankle surgeons. This evolution of our medical specialty is reflected in both the curriculum of our colleges of podiatric medicine, but even more drastically in our podiatric residencies and fellowships, many which offer training in “reconstructive foot and ankle surgery.” While this may sound impressive to the



lay public and the medical community, the core question is, “Does it benefit our graduates and their future patients?”

Our students are graduating with hundreds of thousands of dollars of debt while reimbursement for foot and ankle surgery has dropped precipitously. A recent article in *Foot & Ankle Orthopedics* concludes, “Over the past two decades, physician reimbursement for foot and ankle procedures has dramatically decreased by up to 48.3%.

Continued downward trend in orthopedic foot and ankle physician reimbursement may lead to decreased access to quality foot and ankle care.”

The reality is that most patients with foot and ankle problems go to a podiatrist for treatment of conditions like heel pain, plantar fasciitis, diabetic ulcers, verrucae, ingrown toenails, onychomycosis, and other covered services. While it’s true that podiatrists perform surgery for hammertoes and bunions, the number of patients visiting our offices for reconstructive rearfoot and ankle surgery is limited. As Dr. Bret Ribotsky famously said, “Surgery is fun, but fungus pays the bills.”

Respectfully Submitted,

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Dedicated to Practice Growth and Prosperity Since 1982

Volume 41, Number 8

Publisher	Scott C. Borowsky 610-645-6950
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Periodicals postage paid at Bryn Mawr, PA 19010 and additional entry.

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