

Healthcare Professions Merit Badge and Podiatric Medicine Update



Figure 1: Health Care Professions Merit Badge

Our medical specialty is now more accurately depicted.

BY MARC HASPEL, DPM

Five years ago, in the pages of *Podiatry Management* magazine, the story detailing the goal of establishing the merit badge system by the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) first appeared. The merit badge system is an integral part of scout training and personal development. This successful effort in getting podiatric medicine properly portrayed alongside general medicine, veterinary medicine, and dental medicine was being led by Bruce Blank, DPM of Ohio. Aside from the notable recognition podiatric medicine received by updating its description the timing could not have been better in helping student recruitment efforts, which could only benefit this profession.



Dr. Blank

Student recruitment remains an issue today. The good news is, however, that with Boy Scouts of America's youth membership having exceeded its year-over-year census numbers by more than three percent, surpassing 1,042,000 members, there is a tremendous number of young people to expose to a career in podiatric medicine. Now, the initial goal of a separate merit badge has morphed into one Healthcare Professions Merit Badge (Figure 1) with podiatric medicine proudly included.

To provide insight on the significance and usefulness of this updated merit badge and its potential benefit to podiatric medicine, *Podiatry Management* Magazine has once again invited Dr. Blank to discuss the new Healthcare Professions Merit



Dr. Scartozzi

Badge. Also joining the discussion is prominent Scouts BSA leader, Gino Scartozzi, DPM, of Long Island, New York, who has devoted many years of service to this fine and important organization.

PM: What role does the Merit Badge Program play in influencing young scouts on choosing potential careers?

Blank: The Scouts BSA Merit Badge Program allows scouts to gain experience and develop a wide variety of skills in such areas as outdoor activities, sports, crafts and, also importantly, the fields of business, trades, and science. That exposure has been known to lead scouts to choose careers they might never have considered otherwise.

Scartozzi: There are fourteen merit badges that are required, and seven elective merit badges that are

Continued on page 80

Boy Scouts (from page 79)

required, for male or female scouts to achieve the rank of Eagle Scout. One of these required merit badges is First Aid. This can lead scouts to explore health professions like podiatric medicine further by participating in the Healthcare Professions Merit Badge. These badges lead to life skills that scouts will benefit from through-

PM: *What has occurred since you first pursued a specific Merit Badge in Podiatric Medicine and Surgery?*

Blank: Podiatric physicians had been included directly following allopathic and osteopathic physicians in the same section of the Medicine Merit Badge Pamphlet. The description of podiatric physicians, however, fell far short of accurately

assist in creating a future new merit badge.

As I was planning to volunteer in a medical unit at the World Scout Jamboree in the summer of 2019, I found this to be a perfect opportunity to set the stage for raising awareness by creating the exhibit. The Podiatric Medicine Exhibit at the Jamboree, with the assistance of many others, became a reality. Many scouts, leaders, and variety of other medical volunteers visited the exhibit, where scouts and some leaders participated in hands-on workshops. Several physicians and nurses who participated in the exhibit told me that they were previously unaware of and impressed by the scope of practice of current day podiatrists.

While continuing to work toward the goal of a merit badge specifically for podiatry, like those for dentistry and veterinary medicine, I learned that the Merit Badge Committee was working on decreasing the speed of growth of new free-standing merit badges by combining related areas.

“The success of the merit badge program is having those scouts determine what fields direct their interests.”—Scartozzi

out their lives. There are many other merit badges for scouts to investigate, however, and to explore opportunities in different fields of study. In fact, there are over 135 different badges for them to discover a potential occupation or hobby that they may find of interest to them.

I am a merit badge counselor in the field of Healthcare Professions, First Aid, Emergency Preparedness, Cooking, Fishing, Scouting Heritage, Chess, and even Geology. I always encourage scouts to participate in as many merit badges as possible to expose themselves to as many fields of potential interest. The success of the merit badge program is having those scouts determine what fields direct their interests. It is all right if they decide that they choose not to complete a certain elective merit badge. At least, they were open to exploring that badge and learn to be open to the possibility of new experiences.

portraying today’s podiatric profession. I scheduled an appointment at Scouts BSA Headquarters in Dallas, TX, and was accompanied by Texas podiatrist and fellow Eagle Scout Paul Kinberg, DPM.

We met with a scout executive concerning our desire to create a Po-

“I realized that perhaps a new goal had presented itself: editing the newly created/revised Health Care Professions Merit Badge to reflect current-day podiatric medicine and surgery.”—Blank

diatric Medicine Merit Badge. The executive eventually suggested that we develop a Podiatric Medicine Exhibit for the 2019 World Scout Jamboree to showcase podiatry, thereby introducing our field to scouts and leaders to

As of November 2021, the Medicine Merit Badge had been replaced by the Health Care Professions Merit Badge, and the likelihood of convincing Scouts BSA to add a new singular merit badge, was no longer as promising.

The new Health Care Professions Merit Badge Pamphlet would continue to include DPMs in the same general category of MDs and DOs, which was good; unfortunately, the description of podiatry in the revised pamphlet used the same out-of-date language that had been used in the Medicine Merit Badge Pamphlet for years. It did not include words such as “podiatric physician”, “surgeon”, “ankle”, “leg”, “resident,” or “fellowship”. The description of our training

Continued on page 82

Boy Scouts (from page 80)

was limited to only mentioning the requirement of an undergraduate degree followed by four years of education leading to the Doctor of Podiatric Medicine degree. The practice environment for DPMs only listed private practice or group practice.

At that point, I realized that perhaps a new goal had presented itself: editing the newly creat-

the changes to the next printing of the pamphlet.

Our suggested changes describing Podiatric Medicine and Surgery more accurately now appear in the newest edition of the Health Care Professions Merit Badge Pamphlet.

Scartozzi: Since the inclusion of podiatry within the Health Care Professions Merit Badge, I have been able to directly introduce scouts, not

Scouts inherently are taught to emphasize service to others, trustworthiness, loyalty, helpfulness, and kindness, which in part make up the Scout law. These are essential and expected traits for those who practice within the field of podiatry, and other healthcare professions. Also, it has been my personal experience that scouts tend to demonstrate academic and enhanced work ethic traits that would be needed to pursue podiatric medical studies. Their advancement within the scouting program makes them prepared to succeed in this field, along with any other they may choose.

Blank: There are four groups of healthcare professions described in the Healthcare Professions Merit Badge, and podiatric physicians appear in Group One, which also includes MDs, DOs, as well as some other medical professions. When scouts pursue the merit badge, they must choose three professions from

“Hopefully, some of those scouts will pursue podiatric medicine and surgery as a career.”—Blank

ed/revised Health Care Professions Merit Badge to reflect current-day podiatric medicine and surgery. Additionally, since our practices have more in common with the other professions described in the Health Care Professions Merit Badge Pamphlet than the ones of the more free-standing fields of Dental Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, it made more sense to stay within the groups with the former.

To accomplish the goal of getting the description of podiatric medical doctors to be more accurate and thorough, we first needed more knowledgeable writers; no podiatric physician had been listed as a consultant for the previous Medicine Merit Badge Pamphlet, nor for the revised Health Care Professions Merit Badge. Happily, podiatric physicians from across the country, including college deans, former scouts, and one former scout executive responded to my requests and submitted editorial suggestions, as did I.

These editorial suggestions were forwarded on to the APMA, and former APMA President, Jeff DeSantis, DPM penned an important letter to Scouts BSA, informing them of the inaccuracies and requesting changes. After confirming receipt of that letter by Scouts BSA, I emailed my executive contact at the Scouts BSA Headquarters, who, in turn, connected me with the national head of the Scouts BSA Merit Badge Committee. Following some email correspondence and a Zoom meeting, he agreed to make

just in my capacity as a medical staff officer at many scout events, but also in a more formal and direct office setting. Much thanks and gratitude are due to Dr. Bruce Blank in his advocacy of inclusion of podiatry and other healthcare fields in the

“This merit badge allows scouts to investigate, visit, and participate in meetings with podiatrists or other healthcare professionals.”—Scartozzi

Healthcare Professions Merit Badge approved by Scouts BSA on a national level. This merit badge allows scouts to investigate, visit, and participate in meetings with podiatrists or other healthcare professionals. They can learn what are the educational requirements to pursue that career, and how to interact and play a role in the larger healthcare system with other different healthcare professions. They can learn about the conditions they may commonly treat and even the challenges, they may face daily.

PM: *What is the significance of podiatric medicine being included in the Healthcare Professions Merit Badge?*

Scartozzi: The introduction of podiatry is a benefit to our field by becoming a source of recruitment among a driven young population of students.

each group (total of twelve) and describe: 1) the roles they play in the delivery of healthcare; and 2) the educational and licensing requirements for each choice. Then, scouts will select one of the healthcare careers they researched, and schedule a visit at a professional’s office, where a list of prepared questions will help them broaden their knowledge of that field.

The process is an opportunity, not only for scouts, but also for their families and adult leaders, to learn about this profession. Hopefully, some of those scouts will pursue podiatric medicine and surgery as a career. And, even if they choose another healthcare career, their awareness of podiatry likely would positively affect referrals to and working relationships with podiatrists, which in turn may impact many patients’ well-being and quality of life.

Continued on page 84

PODIATRY AND THE COMMUNITY

Boy Scouts (from page 82)

PM: How is the Healthcare Professions Merit Badge generally conveyed to members of BSA?

Scartozzi: The offering of merit badge opportunities can be through a scout leader, who may be the advancement chair of a troop. Scouts, themselves, may also initiate participating in a particular merit badge by informing the troop advancement chair, scoutmaster, or other adult leader, and obtain a “blue card”. Scouts are provided a list of merit badge counselors for the Healthcare Professions Merit Badge with their contact information from their leaders. Scouts may then contact the merit badge counselor of their choice by phone and/or email with a parent or guardian’s involvement. All the parties discuss the expectations to complete the merit badge, and when a formal meeting is to be established upon completion of the scouts’ work. The counselor also advises the scouts to contact them if they have questions or concerns as they progress through the merit badge program.

The offering of the Healthcare Professions Merit Badge can also be recommended to those scouts who have completed another merit badge like First Aid, to investigate the various medical fields of study. These scouts can also be recommended to consider the merit badge after working with an adult leader in a first aid or medical capacity with a healthcare professional. Ultimately, the selection of an elective merit badge is the decision of the scouts.

Blank: Scouts are offered a long list of possible merit badge projects. While some badges are required for different ranks, including Eagle Scout, most are electives. Scouts are encouraged to earn merit badges, and it is a source of pride and personal accomplishment and a means of becoming more well-rounded individuals. A few scouts even earn every possible badge.

PM: How can podiatric organizations like APMA and the Colleges

of Podiatric Medicine use podiatry’s presence in the Healthcare Professions Merit Badge to attract potential qualified students?

Blank: Through APMA and AACPM publications and social media, DPMs can be encouraged to become Scouts BSA merit badge counselors. Podiatrists can volunteer with a particular troop or for multiple troops within a council as merit badge counselors. I believe it is more likely for podiatric medicine to be chosen as one of the merit badge professions if there are podiatrists already associated with troops or acting as merit

PM: What can podiatric physicians do to assist in establishing podiatry’s presence in the Healthcare Professions Merit Badge?

Scartozzi: Any adult person, either involved in Scouts BSA or not, can become a merit badge counselor. It would involve filing a BSA adult application, completing an online youth protection program, and coordinating with the membership division of the local scouting council to join as an adult leader for merit badge counseling. Once approved, a counselor can communicate with both the scouts and parents or guard-

“Podiatric physicians can help by being welcoming to those scouts who may wish to learn about podiatry.”—Scartozzi

badge counselors. Of course, it would be much easier to choose those podiatrists who are familiar faces as the healthcare provider whose offices scouts will visit. The more podiatric physicians that are involved in the process, the more likely it is that the field of Podiatric Medicine and Surgery will be chosen by scouts as a future profession. I have heard many instances, over the years, where future podiatrists have picked this profession after being exposed to podiatrists in some way during their youth.

Not to mention, there are now all-girl Scouts BSA troops accessing the same merit badge programs previously limited to boys. Moreover, women make up a growing percentage of this profession. Thus, podiatry’s presence in the merit badge can also attract more girls to choose podiatry as their profession.

Scartozzi: Podiatric organizations on a national, local, and state level can reach out to Scouts BSA national, local, state, and county councils to provide community outreach and in support of the merit badge process, as well as other youth organizations, to address the educational and financial needs to foster these future leaders.

ians about working with them to complete the merit badge when it is pursued. Likewise, podiatric physicians can help by being welcoming to those scouts who may wish to learn about podiatry.

Equally important, I would like to reach out to those podiatric physicians who have sons, daughters, grandsons, or granddaughters. I would respectfully suggest for them to involve their families in scouting and to volunteer as leaders in whatever capacity they can afford. It is a sure way to cement their legacy through not only their children, but in the lives of other youth.

PM: What are your final thoughts on the completion of the goal achieving the full establishment of podiatry within the Healthcare Professions Merit Badge system?

Blank: Since the recent publication of the edited pamphlet to provide accurate and up-to-date information about podiatric medicine and surgery, I believe we have reached the goal. It was my dream to improve podiatry’s impact on Scouts BSA; so many in the family of our profession worked to make it happen including individ-

Continued on page 86

PODIATRY AND THE COMMUNITY

Boy Scouts (from page 84)

ual podiatrists, the colleges of podiatric medicine, many podiatric suppliers, and the State Components at the APMA House of Delegates. Generous

treatment, and prevention of disease and malfunctions of the foot, ankle, and related structures of the leg. The DPM treats, through medical and surgical means, different types of foot, ankle, and lower-leg problems,

in a more accurate fashion. It not only outlines the requirement of an undergraduate degree and four years of education leading to the DPM degree, but also details a mandatory post-graduate three-year hospital-based residency, and optional fellowship training. Moreover, the practice environment now mentions various practice arrangements including private practice, single specialty and multispecialty groups, orthopedic groups, hospital-based practices, and those within academic, military, and veterans' health centers. **PM**

“The new description mentions updated information of podiatric education, post-graduate three-year residencies, and optional fellowship training.”—Blank

donations were given to cover expenses for those who volunteered at the Podiatric Medicine Exhibit. To all who helped, I offer my thanks.

Here is a just a sample of the greatly improved new description of podiatry in the merit badge pamphlet. It states, “a podiatrist, also known as a podiatric physician and surgeon, is a specialist who deals with the examination, diagnosis,

including gait disturbances in children and adults; ankle injuries and fractures among athletes and others; bunions and hammertoes; and foot ulcers, abnormal toenails, and skin, soft tissue and bone abnormalities in people who have diabetes, circulatory disorders, or other conditions associated with risk of amputation.”

Additionally, the updated description discusses our education



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.