



Saving Limbs and Lives

How podiatry can help tackle the
elective care backlog

Who we are:

The Royal College of Podiatry is the academic authority for podiatry in the UK and the professional body and trade union for the UK's registered podiatrists. We provide information to the public, media and health organisations; we also give professional and employment support to podiatrists in the UK.

Further foot health information:

The Royal College of Podiatry website www.rcpod.org.uk provides a wealth of information on common foot conditions and general foot health advice.

Saving limbs and lives: How podiatry can help tackle the elective care backlog

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Podiatry definition:

A podiatrist diagnoses and treats disorders and complications of the foot and lower limb.¹

The Need

The current elective care backlog after the COVID-19 pandemic sits at over 6 million people, up from 4.4 million people before the pandemic. The government estimates that this number will hit 10 million by 2024.²

There is also significant concern that the drop in routine appointments over the past two years will lead to a record level of foot ulceration and lower limb amputations out of the pandemic.³



70% OF PEOPLE DIE WITHIN 5 YEARS OF HAVING AN AMPUTATION



50% DIE WITHIN 5 YEARS OF DEVELOPING A DIABETIC FOOT ULCER⁴

£1 BILLION A YEAR
COST OF THESE CONDITIONS TO THE NHS IN ENGLAND⁵

Given that routine diabetic foot screening halved in 2021³ and that 4.9 million people in the UK have diabetes, tens of thousands of people inevitably will be suffering from delayed diagnoses for diabetic foot conditions with many suffering potentially deadly consequences.⁶

Estimates show that by 2025, 1.2 million people with diabetes in the UK will - if they are to remain ulcer and amputation free⁷ - require regular podiatry appointments.

From 2015-2018, 176 toe, foot and leg amputations were carried out each week in England.⁸ 80% of these were preventable. We are yet to see how high this number will rise out of the pandemic?

How Podiatry Can Help

The UK is facing a care crisis. A crisis that will be compounded and multiplied as diabetes diagnoses inevitably soar. Podiatry is in the unique position to alleviate the care burden on NHS services across England through a combination of prevention, early intervention, and salvage procedures.

If the NHS is to reduce the care backlog and prevent avoidable loss of limbs and lives, then podiatry must be at the heart of its efforts to do so.

Podiatrists have a vital role to play in:

- 1 **Prevention and management of diabetic foot complications** which cost the NHS £1 billion a year.
- 2 **Prevention of strokes through the detection of atrial fibrillation.** Strokes cost the NHS £3 billion a year⁹, and they kill 32,000 people annually.¹⁰
- 3 **Management of musculoskeletal complications**, which cost the NHS approximately £5 billion a year, accounts for 30% of all GP Consultations and affect 8.75 million people in the UK every year.¹¹

The Challenge

There are currently just under 10,000 registered podiatrists, (just 1 per 5,500 residents) in England and this number is likely to decline due to age demographics.¹²

In 2016, the removal of NHS bursaries for student podiatrists saw the number of undergraduate students studying podiatry decline by 38%. Before this, the student bursary sat at £9,000 a year.

In 2020, the government reintroduced student bursaries at £5,000. While this has caused a slight improvement in recruitment to the profession, it falls far short of ensuring the future of the podiatry workforce - one that will be required to deal with the oncoming wave of severe diabetic foot complications out of the pandemic.

The government must reinstate the full podiatry student bursary of £9,000 a year, if it is to ensure that podiatrists can save thousands of limbs and lives in the years to come.

How you can help

- 1. **Meet with the Royal College of Podiatry** to discuss the issues outlined in this briefing further.
- 2. **Submit a written question** on future government support for podiatry and the podiatry workforce. (RCPod can provide proposed questions).

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