

ASU Caduceus News



Spotlight On: Podiatry

Each week we will be spotlighting a different health profession. In addition, we will also put out editions focusing on common questions like, should I be an MD/DO or a PA? Today's spotlight is on Podiatry, or Podiatric Medicine. If you have a health profession or question you think should be addressed, feel free to email us and let us know at prehealthtempe@asu.edu

What is Podiatric Medicine?

Podiatry. You've likely heard of it before and some of you may have even visited one. But have you considered podiatry as a health career? You may even hear people wrongly disparage podiatry as a 'back-up' plan or somehow 'lesser' than other professions. This is patently false; podiatry is a specialized professional healthcare field much like dentistry or pharmacy and is worth considering as you explore your path in healthcare. In addition, podiatrists are defined as physicians by the federal government.

The human foot has a complex interrelation with the rest of the body, which means that it may be the first area to show signs of serious conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. A podiatrist is a Doctor of Podiatric Medicine (DPM), known also as a podiatric physician or surgeon, qualified by their education to diagnose and treat conditions affecting the foot, ankle and related structures of the leg. A DPM is a specialist in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of lower extremity disorders, diseases, and injury. Podiatrists often detect serious health problems that may otherwise go unnoticed, because a number of diseases manifest first through symptoms of the lower extremities (i.e., diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, or kidney disease). Podiatrists work closely with other members of healthcare teams to treat and control diseases.

Podiatrists will complete 4 years of health/medical education training followed by three-years of hospital-based residency training. All podiatrists will be licensed as surgeons. Upon completion of residency, Podiatrists may go on to complete fellowship training and become

certified specialists. Within the profession, podiatric physicians can specialize in a variety of areas such as surgery, orthopedics, or public health. Besides these certified specialties, podiatrists may practice a subspecialty such as sports medicine, pediatrics, dermatology, radiology, geriatrics, or diabetic foot care. Podiatric physicians are the only doctors to receive specialized medical and surgical training, and board certification in the care of the lower extremity.

Pros and Cons of a Career in Optometry:

Pros

Cons

Pre-Podiatry Requirements

Students considering applying to podiatry school should focus on both academic and non-academic factors prior to application. Luckily, you'll find most prerequisites for podiatry school match those of other health professions.

Academics:

All optometry schools require you to complete prerequisite coursework prior to admission. Many of these courses provide content which will be tested on the OAT and serve as the foundation for your graduate basic health sciences during the first two years of optometry school.

Letters of Recommendation:

You should be introducing yourself to faculty members and engaging throughout the semester to build a good working relationship prior to asking for a letter. Coming from a large university with large classes will not absolve you from needing letters. Letters are an important component to your application and are reviewed prior to admitting you to an optometry program.

Non-Academics:

Exposure to the field of podiatry is helpful to articulating why you are interested in entering the profession. Students should aim to spend some time shadowing, volunteering, or working in settings with podiatrists to learn more about the profession and determine whether or not it's a good fit. While there is no minimum number of hours students should complete, the more exposure you gain the better understanding you will have of the pros and cons to entering the profession.

Students should also plan to engage outside the classroom through internships, volunteer work,

student employment, part/full-time employment, and/or research. What you choose to do with your time will help schools build a picture of who you are, what your interests are, and what responsibilities you had in addition to being a student. There is no preference for students to engage in one type of activity over another.

Pre-Optometry Club

Pre-Optometry Summer Programs

- AZPOP - Arizona Pre-Optometry Program at Northwestern University
- OptoCamp - Optometry Camp at UC-Berkeley

Optometry School

There are **9** schools of optometry in the US and students typically apply to 2-4 schools

There is one podiatry school in Arizona: Arizona College of Podiatric Medicine, Northwestern University located in Glendale, Arizona. This is a private institution and has no residency preference, however, ASU students who meet minimum entrance requirements will be given a preferential interview.

Podiatry school is 4 years

- The first two years consist of basic health science classroom learning - classes in biochemistry, genetics, immunology, histology, and more are taken. Students will also have the opportunity to gain clinical exposure in a simulation lab where you will work with your fellow classmates serving as patients.
- Your third year will blend additional classroom sciences with real-world clinical practice.
- Fourth year students engage almost entirely in clinical practice with the opportunity to complete external rotations. External rotations range from 8-16 weeks.

In order to practice as an optometrist, you must complete your degree and pass the licensing exam. The licensing exam consists of written and clinical portions - students will complete the written portions during OD school.

Average GPA for accepted students: 3.44

Optometry Outlook

Optometry is a growing profession, expected to grow nearly 10% in the next 10 years. As current optometrists retire and our population gets older, the need for optometrists is expected to increase. Some cities and regions are more saturated with optometrists than others.

Compensation: The mean salary for optometrists is currently \$112,000 and the median salary is \$115,000.

Cost

OAT Test: \$450

- Results sent to 5 schools
- \$36 per score report for additional schools

OAT Prep: Average \$500, but can increase to over \$1000

Optomcas Application: \$180 + \$70 per additional school

- Average: \$600

Fee Assistance: No

Secondary Applications: Varies, \$0-75

Interviews: Varies

Average Application Costs: \$2,500

Average Tuition at Optometry School: \$48,000

Average Debt from Optometry School: \$225,000

Cost is a major factor when considering any type of professional healthcare degree. Many optometrists will encourage you to determine whether you really love the profession before committing. This is also one reason optometry schools will encourage or require shadowing or other experience in optometry prior to applying. Optometry is a rewarding career with many options and opportunities, but so students who are passionate about the eye should not let the prospect of high debt scare them away. There are many options for paying down debt and most OD's are able to do so comfortably, though payoff may take as many as 20-years.

Videos and resources for more information:

[ASCO YouTube Channel](#)

[Explore Health Careers: Optometry](#)

[Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry](#)

[American Optometric Association](#)

An overview of the role and conditions cared for by an OD

- Corneal abrasions, ulcers, or infections; glaucoma; and other eye diseases that require treatment with pharmaceutical agents, management, and referral when necessary
- Visual skill problems such as the inability to move, align, fixate, and focus the ocular

mechanism in such tasks as reading, driving, computer use, and in tasks related to hobbies and employment

- The inability to properly process and interpret information requiring perception, visualization, and retention such as that needed for most learning tasks
- Poor vision–body coordination when one interacts with the environment, as in sports, occupations, and other everyday activities requiring spatial judgments; and
- Clarity problems such as simple nearsightedness or farsightedness or complications due to the aging process, disease, accident, or malfunction
- Diagnose, manage, and refer systemic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and others that are often first detected in the eye
- Provide presurgical and postsurgical care of cataracts, refractive laser treatment, retinal problems, and other conditions that require presurgical and postsurgical care
- Encourage preventative measures such as monitoring infants' and children's visual development, evaluating job/school/hobby–related tasks, and promoting nutrition and hygiene education.

Note: Optometrists should not be confused with ophthalmologists or dispensing opticians. Ophthalmologists are physicians who perform eye surgery, in addition to diagnosing and treating eye conditions. Dispensing opticians fit eyeglasses and contact lenses, following prescriptions written by ophthalmologists or optometrists.