

Foreword



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“Are you a real doctor?”

“No, but I did stay at a Holiday Inn Express last night.”

—Commercial paraphrase

I think we have got it all wrong when it comes to our professional image. I don't make that statement lightly, and unfortunately it forces us to take a long, hard look at the product we have made visible to the world.

Recently, I had the immense pleasure of being selected as the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of our medical center. Through all of the excitement of the challenge of the job, I had lost site of the sheer volume of work that went into being a successful CMO. I find myself juggling the duties of administration with those of being a podiatrist. Although abbreviated in time, I still practice podiatry and feel that it is a necessity to remain connected with my physician brethren at the hospital. After all, it has been my experience that when a practicing physician gives up the practice and becomes “just a suit,” other physicians lose confidence in that individual.

When the official announcement was made, there were many accolades, and it was a time to celebrate both a personal and professional

accomplishment, until. . . We are the County hospital and thus beholden to the County tax payers. Therefore, we are frequently the target of the *Des Moines Register's* watchdog reporter, and just about anything we do seems to make the paper. The reporter who covers our institution called the day after the announcement was made and asked, "Is he a real doctor?"

This got me thinking about where we are going and what we are trying to accomplish as a profession. I have been involved in meetings in which we argue about who is going to be cutting patients' toenails, who should be physically debriding ulcers, should the physical therapist be recommending or making inserts, and so forth—and we fight vehemently about these items. I have seen the profession become exclusionary to its own members, almost gleeful that we are not all one brotherhood under podiatry and competing against each other rather than working toward a goal of podiatry for all and all for podiatry (yes, there is a bit of the Three Musketeers in that statement, but why not?)—and all for the benefit of our patients!

Apart from the internal fighting, what have we done to promote ourselves to the world? How does the public see us? How do our colleagues in the allopathic and osteopathic professions see us? If the public and other professionals see us as "less than," then isn't it our fault? How could it not be? No, I don't believe that changing our degree is the answer—I believe changing our image is! And it starts from the get-go. Are colleges of podiatric medicine preparing their students *mentally* to be physicians? I'm not talking about parity in the curriculum with allopathic and osteopathic centers of education; I'm referring to attitude. Are we a "systemically shy" profession that passes that insecurity onto our future podiatrists and focuses on the technical aspects of treatment? I know the answer, and so do many of you. Do we really take the time to learn from the bright students who have chosen our profession, or do we ignore their questions with a perfunctory "That's the way I've always done it" type of attitude? In turn, do we push our students to be physicians in the true sense of the word? By definition, a physician is a person trained in the art of healing. How simple, yet perfect. It doesn't say MD, or DO; it does, however, imply a "healer."

We need to express to the public and professional communities, through a strongly united profession, that we are indeed physicians, doctors, and healers—not show a fragmented bunch of individuals who only care about the individual and not the whole. Mr. Spock of the *Star Trek* movies said it very well: "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one." There are many positive ways to satisfy one's ego; just consider the grateful patients we all have the privilege of treating.

A strong professional presence that clearly defines our mission as one of caring for the needs of our patients will go a long way toward answering the question, "Are we real doctors?" This is accomplished by a united effort of the profession to educate the world about our mission and to present ourselves as a desirable profession working toward a common goal. Then we will easily have the numbers of applicants we need to fill our classrooms with

quality students, and we will be graduating a future generation of podiatrists that will be clearly recognized as “doctors.”

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