Podiatric surgery FAQs

Q. What is podiatric surgery?

Podiatric surgery is the surgical management of the bones, joints and soft tissues of the foot and its associated structures. Normally, surgery is performed as a day case procedure and often but not always under local anaesthetic. Conditions treated can include problems caused by bunions, arthritis, toe deformities and inflammation of the tissues of the foot.

As part of their pre-registration education, chiropodists / podiatrists learn how to carry out surgical procedures for skin and nail conditions. Podiatric surgery training significantly extends the podiatrist’s scope of practice into a wider range of invasive procedures involving the foot.

Q. How does someone qualify to become a podiatrist practising podiatric surgery?

In England, registered chiropodists / podiatrists are currently awarded a Certificate of Completion in Podiatric Surgery Training (CCPST) by the College of Podiatry after at least seven years’ post-registration training in this area, allowing them to apply for consultant posts in the NHS.

NHS Education for Scotland has developed a three-year, full-time Podiatric Surgery Training Programme (PSTP) to train podiatrists practising podiatric surgery. There are currently no equivalent training programmes in Northern Ireland or Wales.

Q. How are podiatrists practising podiatric surgery regulated?

Chiropodists / podiatrists must already be registered with the HCPC before they complete additional training in podiatric surgery. Therefore, podiatrists practicing podiatric surgery need to meet the HCPC standards of proficiency for podiatrists, the standards of conduct, performance and ethics, and standards for continuing professional development.

The HCPC has developed proposed standards for podiatric surgery, which set out requirements for education and training as well as the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary for safe and effective podiatric surgery practice. Once agreed, we will use the standards to approve and monitor post-registration education and training programmes in podiatric surgery. We will in the future annotate (mark) the Register to indicate chiropodists / podiatrists who have successfully completed an approved programme and meet the standards for podiatric surgery.

Podiatrists practising podiatric surgery must also adhere to other regulatory standards relating to their practice and are expected to follow relevant guidance on aspects such
as clinical governance, quality and safety. In addition, we are supportive of other mechanisms and initiatives, for example, local annual appraisal systems and other forms of accountability managed by employers.

Q. Why are we annotating the Register for podiatric surgery?

Having previously consulted on this issue, we decided to annotate the entries of chiropodists / podiatrists in the Register who have undertaken approved qualifications in podiatric surgery. We have made this decision in order to strengthen public protection. The scope of practice of podiatric surgery is significantly beyond that of a chiropodist / podiatrist at entry to the Register.

Although podiatrists practising in this area are regulated and accountable for their practice, we do not currently set specific standards for podiatric surgery training or practice or approve qualifying education and training.

Annotation would build on existing systems to improve the way in which risks are currently managed. There will be a number of benefits from annotation:

- annotation will enable specific standards to be set for podiatric surgery training and practice;
- training programmes in podiatric surgery will be approved, providing independent oversight and quality assurance;
- annotating the Register will provide information to members of the public about chiropodists / podiatrists who have completed recognised, approved training in this area, supporting patients to make informed choices about the services they use.

You can find out more about our powers to annotate the Register here.

Q. How does someone check to see if a registrant is qualified to carry out podiatric surgery?

All chiropodists / podiatrists are HCPC registered and individuals can check a professional's registration through our online Register.

Once the proposed standards for podiatric surgery and annotation scheme are in place, patients will be able to check the HCPC Register to see if someone is qualified to practise podiatric surgery.

Q. How can podiatrists use the title ‘surgeon’ when they are not doctors?

Unlike the titles of HCPC-regulated professions, the title ‘surgeon’ is not currently legally protected. The protection of titles requires legislation and is a matter for government.
Many who work in the NHS in England in this area will be employed under the title ‘Consultant podiatric surgeon’ or similar. This title has been in common usage for many years. The term ‘podiatric’ makes it clear that the individual is not a medically qualified doctor and it is important that practitioners are clear about their training, qualifications and scope of practice.

We know that the use of this title is the subject of on-going debate, with concerns expressed by some about the use of the title ‘surgeon’ by those who are not medically qualified.

We consider that, whatever title is used, it is important that patients receive enough information from health and care professionals in order to be able to make informed decisions about their care or treatment. This includes, as far as possible, clarity about a professional’s education, training and skills.

When the annotation is introduced, it will be described as ‘podiatric surgery’. This is consistent with how existing annotations for prescribing are described. We will provide information for members of the public alongside the annotation. We will continue to refer to chiropodists / podiatrists who practise in this area as ‘podiatrists practising podiatric surgery’.

Q. What is the difference between a podiatrist practising podiatric surgery and an orthopaedic surgeon?

Podiatrists practising podiatric surgery are chiropodists / podiatrists who have trained exclusively in the surgical and non-surgical treatment of the foot and ankle.

Orthopaedic surgeons are medical doctors who have undertaken speciality training in surgery to treat disorders of the bones, joints and their associated soft tissues, including ligaments, nerves and muscles. They may or may not specialise further in surgery of the foot and ankle. More information is available from the General Medical Council.