

Fellowship in Diabetic Limb Salvage Research

By: Dr. Kelly A. Powers, DPM

As I approached the end of my residency I was at a career cross-roads. Would I start the job search process or perhaps continue in academia? Although I was confident in my podiatric training and abilities, I wanted to focus on a special interest; to truly dive into a niche. I had taken a liking to wound care as I was heavily exposed to it during my training at *Boston University Medical Center*. Additionally, I had always felt a strong desire to partake in research; however I found it challenging to commit to given scholastic obligations & arduous residency schedules. With much thought and consideration, I had made up my mind to continue in academia and to explore the world of fellowships.

Fellowships are quite common in other fields of medicine and have recently started to pick up momentum in podiatry as well. The title, *Fellow*, as used in health professions, denotes focused training in a medical specialty. Although it is not a mandatory step in our podiatric training and is not required in order to obtain a license, fellowships in podiatric sub-specialties are an increasing trend. Choosing a fellowship is a personal endeavor. The decision is made after years of exposure to various aspects of podiatric medicine & surgery. Podiatric fellowships can run the gamut from research, sports medicine, and surgery among others. Fellowships allow the clinician to focus on a particular area of interest in our vast field. This one (or two) year of focused study aims to instill expansive knowledge, strong mentorship, and build confidence to ideally set the newly-practicing physician apart.

The Diabetic Limb Salvage (DLS) Research Fellowship at *Georgetown University Hospital* is a recognized fellowship of the *American College of Foot & Ankle Surgeons (ACFAS)*. This recognition fosters high-quality training and requires certain criteria be upheld by the College's standards. With its esteemed reputation and superior training, *Georgetown's* DLS Fellowship was the perfect fit for me. It combines my dual interests of wound care and research in a highly regarded and challenging academic atmosphere.

Why a Research Fellowship?

Having always wanted to take time to really leap into the research world, this was an opportunity to uniquely do so. The *Georgetown University Hospital's* DLS Research Fellowship is through the Department of Plastic Surgery and based out of the hospital's *Center for Wound Healing*. This "team approach" allows for exposure to podiatric medicine & surgery in conjunction with plastic surgery, vascular surgery, hyperbaric oxygen (HBO), prosthetics, etc. This unique fellowship allocates a hands-on application of research. I like the idea of seeing a hypothesis go from the paper to the person. Research provides an opportunity to be at the forefront of innovative treatment modalities, products, methods,

etc. Having read copious journal articles throughout my training, I was always fascinated (and perhaps a little intimidated) with the research process. This fellowship enables me to enhance my research skill set by intricately learning the systematic research process. This experience has placed me in the center of all the steps of research (i.e., IRB applications, consenting and enrolling patients, analyzing data, writing, etc.) It is captivating to partake in the transformation from reading a protocol to applying a test article in research clinic. To see the conversion of a one's idea become a tangible study is astounding. Research often provides patients with the "hope" of a new modality. It is wonderful to provide a novel service and share in the possibility of a patient's success. I feel lucky to be a part of the process.

Being the DLS Research Fellow at *Georgetown* has encouraged me to take on leadership roles. I work closely with both podiatry and plastic surgery Residents and often join them in the O.R., at lectures, Journal Club, surgical workshops, and the like. Even though my focus is research, I am encouraged to sharpen my clinical skills and surgical techniques by staying involved in all facets of podiatry and surgery. I am fond of the idea that I am not taking any time off from surgery and patient care.

What my typical week is like?

The *Georgetown University Hospital's* DLS Research Fellowship is a well-balanced experience. The *Center for Wound Healing* is set on the strong foundation of a "team approach" and thus my training is multi-disciplinary. If broken down by percentages I would say about 40% of my week is spent doing research. This encompasses reading protocols, writing abstracts, working with the research team, constructing poster presentations, etc. Furthermore, this includes research clinic where myself and the other team members see patients enrolled in prospective trials. This incorporates the entire systematic research process of consenting, enrolling, and randomizing patients and following them in their subsequent run-in clinic visits. Additionally, I spent about 20% of my week in the operating room and scrubbing in to various podiatric and plastic surgery cases. Another 25% of my week consists of seeing patients in clinic at the *Center for Wound Healing*. These leaves the remaining 15% devoted to academics. I am encouraged to take on leadership roles and work closely with the Residents. I attend a variety of lectures, Grand Rounds, journal clubs, workshops, as well as, rounding a couple nights a week with the Residents on in-house patients. This well-formed week keeps me busy, is intellectually stimulating, and allows for me to be involved in all aspects of podiatric medicine. Most importantly, this experience is providing me the tools to become a well-rounded physician.

It is no surprise a fellowship provides mentorship opportunities. There is no better way to get to know and learn from the best and highly respected experts in a sub-specialty than to work closely with them. I am fortunate to spend one year learning from four truly respected, intelligent, and talented physicians in the world of wound care: Dr. John S. Steinberg, DPM, Dr. Paul J. Kim, DPM, Dr. Christopher E. Attinger, MD, and Dr. Karen K. Kim, MD. What I have learned from them surpasses any chapter I might

read in a book or any class I could have taken in medical school. Their altruistic teaching, passionate guidance, and apprenticeship is beyond measure and confirms my decision to take on this fellowship year.

A research fellowship encompasses so many aspects of hands-on education and sub-specialized training, but ultimately I will walk away knowing, in some capacity, I have made a contribution to our field of podiatric medicine.