Women Who Have Impacted Podiatry

Adding a valuable contribution to our profession.

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When I commenced the data gathering for this article, it was my goal to have each state send me the name of a historical female podiatrist and a presently active female podiatrist in its state. An e-mail blast was sent out from APMA headquarters under the kind direction of Ms. Tina M. Jersey (thank you Tina).

Even though I did not receive responses from every state the overwhelming information is worthwhile sharing. Women have been in leadership position much longer than others have given them credit.

Early Women in Podiatry

The oldest living female podiatrist that I could find is Annie Rotramel of New Ulm, Minnesota. In her own time and in her own way she was able to set a standard of practice for many to emulate.

Yet the one female podiatrist who has left the largest impact by family members alone both male and female is Rose M. Stivers. Dr. Stivers practiced from 1917-1974. She encouraged her traveling salesman husband to become a podiatrist who later became our APMA president in 1951. She sent her sister to chiropody school and then continued to convince two brothers Earl and Stanley and her own children Ed, Tim, Pat and Mary Rose to do the same. In total number, eleven podiatrists came from this one female podiatrist's encouragement and financial support. At one time five podiatrists practiced with Lucille Melloan, Rose's sister. Rose was the historian for APMA (NAC) when her husband was president. She was known for stating she always paid her dues so her vote would always be counted!

Other families with many podiatrists emanating from a female may have existed along the way but one I am familiar with is the Unger/Farber family. Esther Unger Farber was married to Max Farber. Dr. Esther put two of her brothers through school; one of these men then proceeded to
put his son David through podiatry school. Dr. Farber encouraged a nephew to enter podiatry school who later practiced in Florida. No other female podiatrists have come from that family.

In the textbook entitled A Fast Pace Forward by Lisabeth M. Holloway, MS in L.S. (Director of the Center for the History of Foot Care and Foot Wear; there are some interesting historical facts, which speak about generations of families in podiatry. There is a chapter dedicated to women and minorities. A quote found on page 132 written in 1919 by the editor of the Chiropody Record states:

"Chiropody as a profession for women is ideal. It is the only one of the learned professions which has accepted women as practitioners from the very beginning and which has never drawn a sex line. The militant sisters do not have to demand their rights of Chiropody they have always been accepted on a par with the men practitioners of the profession". I guess we were ahead of our time.

In the early years many women did have high-ranking leadership positions. E.A. Griswold President of the Oklahoma Society and Cordelia B. Knowles of Ohio, a founder of the Ohio College were corporators of the NAC in 1912. Harriet H. Danser 1857-1945 was the first secretary of the Florida Association. Anna M. (Dalton) Black was the first woman president of the Wisconsin Society.

Dr. Gennelle Smith, herself a pioneer in podiatry and a historian for AAWP, said she always knew what she wanted and she just did it. She was a self-taught podiatric surgeon who practiced for well over 50 years. She felt when she was resented in 1937 for raising the office price from $1.00 to $2.00 that it was the beginning of her fortitude and perhaps good "fortune". She is proud of doing it on her own. The O'Neill sisters in Connecticut who had a brother who was a physician have both practiced over 50 years but they knew they were "on their own." They were advised to "walk lightly" not knowing how lightly was light they went on to become very successful in Fairfield, CT.

Dr. Esther Unger Farber who practiced close to 50 years used to say during her Tuesday night chats with me how the financial independence of practicing podiatry placed women in a league all by ourselves. When I bought her practice in 1980 her best advice was to get involved at a leadership level or keep quiet and don't complain. "Don't settle for less than the top!"

Dr. Elizabeth Roberts, recipient of the APMA Distinguished Service Citation, challenged us as students "to do it all." She said you could do it all private practice, hobbies, community education, writing (lay and
academic) as well as teaching curriculum writing and motherhood. Dr. Roberts was co-founder of the American Podiatric Medical Writers Association, was the first female to attain full professor status at NYCPM (ironically, I became the second female to be appointed, over 30 years later). As per Dr. Roberts, if you were true to yourself and knew good management skills there was even time for travel!

On the other hand Dr. Mildred Dixon, who has long been active in the interests of minority students, thinks women still have a battle. Many would agree with her. Dr. Dixon has been president of the Association of Podiatrists in Federal Services and the National Association of Podiatrists. She was the first female Chief of Podiatric Service in the VA. We all need to emulate her attitude on defense mechanisms and strategy. She was a black woman in Montgomery who could not eat in Montgomery when she took her state boards, but still drove into town alone that day.

Dr. Dixon tells a cute story on how she always carried a *Reader's Digest* with her everywhere she went. She would sit at a table alone and start reading, so as to discourage conversation. The table would eventually fill up. She often times was the only woman (and a black one at that) not welcomed. As a black woman in the South she had to leave politics outside of her door and win acclaim and respect by hard work and a quiet ambience. She is so glad to still be alive today to see so many doors open to women both financially, academically and politically.

She and Dr. Elizabeth Roberts were visible at the national level of podiatry when I was a student. Sometimes being the only women at a national meeting. Each in her own way was committed to advancing the role of women in podiatry. In actuality, there were many others who impacted podiatry and taught among things good practice skills and leadership competency.

Dr. Alfreda Sluzewski was the first woman president of the Indiana State Podiatric Medical Association in 1949. Her nephew was president in 1988. Among her many accomplishments during and following her term as president, she was instrumental in rectifying the discrimination against African-Americans in her state organization. She practiced for 48 years and is still giving advice on a consultant basis.

Dr. Amy Katzew is still practicing in Massachusetts, after over 50 years. She is chief of podiatry at Beth Israel Hospital, a Harvard Hospital Institution. She may be one of the only podiatrists who has ever been president of a medical staff, let alone the only woman! Her mother was a medical doctor and her sister was a podiatrist. All were pioneers in the New England area. Dr. Katzew is noted for her academic prominence and leadership in developing podiatric clinics. She is near and dear to many of
us women because she still takes an active role in counseling us! She and Dr. Roberts have a dying skill perfected: writing notes commending you for a job well done! Dr. Katzew has been a role model to many including myself.

In 1965 Dr. Nancy Lu Conrad took an interest in finding out why women for four decades had been invisible at the higher level of the national profession. There were five out of 200 on the APA’s rosters who inquired boldly of the podiatric medical schools as to the number of female students; Illinois, Ohio and Pennsylvania reported seven. Dr. McNevin reports via AACPMM that 716 women are present in all classes for the 2001 school year; a 10,000 percent increase! Dr. Conrad was one of the first to encourage female fellowship at the national level.

**AAWP**

Later on Dr. Patricia Kopenhaver through the encouragement of Dr. Lawrence Lefler was able to acquire the charter for the American Association of Women Podiatrists. Dr. Conrad who is a well known speaker and lay publication author advises women podiatrists of today to do just as she did; advertise, give lectures, write articles and be your own public relations ambassador.

Dr. Kopenhaver has worked hard and alone in another avenue of pursuit. She has started an endowment scholarship at NYCPM and at Barry University. The first and only female dean to date was at Barry, Dr. Valerie Brunetti. Their president, Sr. Jeanne O’Laughlin, commended Dr. Kopenhaver by awarding her a Doctor of Law Degree in 1998.

**From Pioneers to Present**

Taking the transition from early pioneers to present "active duty" female podiatrists is very exciting. There are over 25 female podiatrists who either have been presidents of state societies or will be president within the next year or two. Women have expanded their horizons a hundred fold.

Upon interviewing those whose names were sent to me I asked two questions. How has podiatry impacted your life, and how have you left a mark upon podiatry. In almost every circumstance the female podiatrist responded that their management skills helped bring order to meetings. Dr. Moira McDermott teased in saying being the mother of three boys gave her some skills in handling state society meetings. She also believes visibility and her leadership has expanded the understanding of others as to what podiatry is all about.
Dr. Pat Moore after being president of her state society is now president elect of the Indiana Public Health Association. Dr. Janet Simon after too many years as president observed that our profession needs to "stick its neck out of the sand". Dr. Simon states our profession is suffering by not being aware of the politics of our communities. Dr. Simon states as part of the evolution of her practice, she has partnered with a respected pedorthist to develop the shoe store/pedorthic facility of their dreams. It is leading the forefront for educating the public about appropriate footwear.

Dr. Rita Rae Fontenot has taken what Dr. Simon and Dr. Moore have suggested to an entire different pursuit. She is the owner and chief sponsor of a Triathelon. She is a leisure-learning professor at McNeese State University. She is a guest for Live @ Five news at Noon and The Early Show. She has hosted Chinese and French orthopedists and has traveled abroad to teach surgery. She has been a podiatrist on medical missions to Mexico and Nicaragua. The most notable thing that she has done for our profession is to get the hospitals of Southwest Louisiana to open their staffs to podiatrists. It took being the sacrificial lamb, a lawsuit of 12 years duration and lots of money! Her "Let Someone Fill Your Shoes" campaign is still yet another way of serving the public and putting podiatry in the forefront of heath care.

Dr. Barbara Schlefman who at present is probably the longest actively practicing female podiatrist in Georgia not only writes, teaches and publishes on podiatric surgery but she is a board certified aerobics teacher. She is president elect of the Georgia Podiatric Medical Association and has represented her state for over fifteen years at the APMA National.

Dr. Mallory Eisenman the Vice President of the Pennsylvania Podiatric Medical Association likes what she does. She sincerely feels her sensitivity toward her female patients and their need to wear high heels is a plus. Yet, the rest of us know she has also broken barriers by being the first woman on staff at her local hospital. Her biggest dilemma will be being president and being a solo practitioner at the same time.

Dr. Terri Conroy battled for the longest to give women visibility within our national organization. She also accomplished a public health image for podiatry in the city of brotherly love. Dr. Terri you led the way for the modern female podiatrist! And we thank you for your hard labor.

Illinois Podiatric Medical Association has had and still has great female leadership. Dr. Lola Reisgraf was president in the 1960's. Dr. Lila Mancini was president in 1992-1993. Dr. Jondell Jenkins at present is vice president. She is honest to say that the road, as a black woman, has not been smooth but certainly rewarding. She says she will continue to help podiatry to take it place in the mainstream of medicine. Dr. Laura Prichard
is secretary. To quote Dr. Pichard "you get what you give" and podiatry is a great way to "touch" humanity.

Within the VA System, Dr. Leila Banks, who is chief of the podiatry section at McGuire VA Medical Center has been at this post for twenty-five years! She has impacted our profession by teaching, and training all students from all of our podiatric colleges as interns and residents. She states, "My ride on the podiatric bandwagon has been wonderful and unforgettable. I have gained tremendous satisfaction by providing podiatric care at an educational multi-center."

Dr. Nancy Rozran after a unanimous recommendation from NYS Podiatric Medical Association and upon the recommendation of the Commission of Educators, in February 1989 became the second woman, following the footsteps of Dr. Elizabeth Roberts, to be appointed to the State Board of Podiatry in New York. She later served as Chairperson: screening cases, serving on panels and awarding CME credits. Dr. Rozran has served as a model of professionalism and out-spoken advocacy for our profession. Whereby, encouraging and supporting colleagues to maintain recognition for our profession in the eyes of the public and medical world. "Each of us is a cog in the process," she says, and we need to improve our image. In her multi serving positions she has been the first woman on most committees, but welcomes the next generation who she believes will be better prepared to take its place in the health care delivery system.

Dr. Arlene Hoffman answers in the most profound manner when asked about the impact of podiatry upon her life, "it is who I am." She who taught at CCPM at a Ph.D. level prior to entering podiatric medical school should be credited for the evolution of the Basic Science curriculum. She brought podiatry to a medical school level of standard affecting all other podiatric schools as well. She has taught critical thinking for differential diagnosing, and she credits her impact upon podiatry as a female educator for well over thirty years.

Another female podiatrist who came from a teaching/observational position and chose to leave her nursing profession to enter podiatric medical school is Dr. Kathy Stone. She values what each of us can do to alleviate chronic pain on a daily basis. She herself gets a warm and "fuzzy" good feeling when treating her patients. She believes her every day giving of service to her patients is her impact upon podiatry. She strongly encourages others on how well we can maintain our family lives and still be active in politics because our profession has a special perspective. When combining didactic and practical foot care treatments, on a daily basis, it is important to realize podiatrists are the primarily care providers of the foot.
Dr. Pat Ragley, as past president of the Kansas Podiatric medical Association and AAPSM, and as an attorney, states that she has not only been the advocate for patients and foot health issues but as a crusader she tries to make our mission known to others. When formulating legislation it is important for us to be on equal footing with all physicians in health care legislations. Dr. Ragley feels the podiatric physicians she has worked with in PMA and AAPSM were an inspiration to her with their dedication and commitment. She continues to do the same in her teaching of podiatric medical students and residents. She too reminds us that we are the primary foot care providers in the U.S.

Dr. Nancy Parsley feels as if she "is one of the lucky ones" to have worked with the best podiatry has to offer at APMA. She has had the opportunity as an APMA Congressional Fellow to meet tremendous people in D.C. and expand her own horizon. She, like Dr. Hoffman, considers this life of hers more than a career—it is my life!

In conclusion I would say each of the women aforementioned took podiatry as a vocation. They did not only make people's feet better, but have given to their community wisdom, leadership and fortitude. As Dr. Pat Moore said, "in our need to educate the public about podiatry don't cut short your own leadership skills." They should be put into active gear in your local communities.

We as podiatrists need to be role models for college students encouraging them to join our ranks. If anyone is looking for a mentor please contact one of the women mentioned in this article; you will not be disappointed. To my sisters in podiatry, I salute you!