



Guidelines for Footcare Assistants – Assistance in Podiatry

The Podiatrists Board of Queensland acknowledges the need for an increased provision of 'basic foot care' in an environment which upholds public safety and quality of care. This guideline serves to provide a model by which Footcare Assistants [FCA] can assist in meeting the public need for future footcare services through performing a suitable range of allocated duties.

This guideline acknowledges a role for a suitably trained Footcare Assistant to provide foot hygiene services for the people of Queensland under supervision of a Podiatrist. The guideline is applicable across all workplaces: in the private sector, non-government sector and public sector.

The purpose of this document is to:

1. provide a framework for Footcare Assistants working under supervision and direction of Podiatrists,
2. provide fundamental definitions pertaining to the practice of Footcare Assistants,
3. define the scope of practice of the Footcare Assistant

The Podiatrist is at all times responsible for the person's assessment, diagnosis, care planning, management and evaluation of treatment outcomes. The Podiatrist has a legal and ethical responsibility to ensure high professional standards are maintained.

Referrals from the Podiatrist to the Footcare Assistant must only occur after discussion with the person who is to receive the care. The person's consent must be obtained for the care to be delivered by a person who is not a registered podiatrist, prior to provision of the care.

If the Podiatrist elects to delegate a task, or temporarily transfers the care of a person to a Footcare Assistant, the Podiatrist is responsible for the outcome. The Podiatrist must ensure that there is a clearly defined process for regular and ongoing review of the persons' footcare. Details should be documented in the person's care plan and would include referral to the Footcare Assistant and the tasks delegated if this was consented to.

The Podiatrist must therefore ensure that the person has been appropriately assessed and that the Footcare Assistant to whom they have delegated:

1. Understands what is expected of him/her and has a clearly, written care plan with expected outcomes and target dates.
2. Has the knowledge, skills and recognized qualifications to effectively and safely carry out the tasks the Podiatrist has asked him/her to do.
3. Documents all care provided to the person in accordance with protocols of the workplace.



4. Is aware of when and under what circumstances the person should be reviewed by the Podiatrist.
5. Is able to refer the person back to the delegating Podiatrist or another Podiatrist without delay, if he/she is uncertain or concerned in any way as to the altered health status or the response to the care being provided.

The policies and procedures surrounding the use of Footcare Assistants must be documented as they apply to each workplace. A copy of this documentation must be available to all staff for reference.

In terms of clinical care and the use of instrumentation, hands-on footcare provided by a Footcare Assistant is in the form of foot hygiene only and is to be conducted on low-risk patients. People will present with varying medical, social, economic and environmental issues and it is the responsibility of the supervising Podiatrist to consider all relevant factors in determining whether referral to a Footcare Assistant for foot hygiene is appropriate.

Foot hygiene is defined as fundamental attention given to normal toe nails and skin surfaces of the foot, including washing and drying, the cutting and filing of toe nails, the removal of loose superficial dead skin material interdigitally and the application of drying or softening agents. It does not allow for the use of scalpel blades or other cutting implements for the removal of hyperkeratotic tissue or the deliberate penetration of the epidermis.

Each workplace and each organisation must demonstrate appropriate mechanisms for clinical governance and is responsible for continuously improving the quality of their services through ongoing evaluation mechanisms. These quality mechanisms safeguard the standard of care and create an environment in which excellence in clinical care will flourish.

Adequate professional support is to be made available to Footcare Assistants from employers and the Podiatrists.



Footcare Assistant: Scope of Practice

The scope of practice of the Footcare Assistant may include the following administration tasks, clinical skills and use of modalities.

The supervising Podiatrist:

1. Is responsible for management of the person's podiatric care and clearly document tasks requested of the Footcare Assistant
2. Must assess the client prior to each session of care provided by the Footcare Assistant
3. Must ensure that the Footcare Assistant is competent to use and be familiar with the procedure for the safe application of the modality
4. Must clearly delineate the site and scope of care to be provided
5. Must determine the duration and dosage of the modality
6. Must ensure that the person receiving the care is informed of all safety procedures, contraindications and the possible reactions of the modality to be applied
7. Must ensure that in the event that the person experiences or reports the occurrence of pain, discomfort or unexpected outcomes from the care provided; the application of the modality must cease and the matter reported to the supervising Podiatrist immediately
8. Must reassess the client at the conclusion of the delegated modality being used.

The Footcare Assistant may prioritise referrals based on a protocol developed by the Podiatrist. The Footcare Assistant may undertake foot screening. Screening will involve a consultation with the person, the completion of a screening form [created by the Podiatrist] and then referral to the Podiatrist in order for a management plan to be provided.

The scope of practice of a Footcare Assistant includes:

1. Assisting the Podiatrist with organisation and the administration of clinical consultations

- Preparing the consultation area
- Assisting the person before and after the consultation
- Assisting in generating and maintaining medical records



2. Assisting the Podiatrist with providing care

- Assisting the Podiatrist with the collection of demographic data and other personal information
- Applying basic dressings, padding and strapping under the direction of the Podiatrist
- Assisting the Podiatrist during minor skin and nail procedures

3. Assisting with orthotic modifications

- Assisting the podiatrist with modifications of orthoses under the direction of the Podiatrist

4. Assisting with footwear modifications

- Assisting the podiatrist with footwear modifications under the direction of the Podiatrist

5. Assisting in the function of podiatric practice

- Conducting infection control for the practice, including instrument cleaning and instrument sterilisation
- Maintaining equipment in the podiatry practice
- Ordering and facilitating correct and safe storage of stock

6. Assist in podiatric practice administration

- Conducting administrative duties associated with running a podiatric clinic



7. Working as a member of a podiatry practice

- Working within the laws, regulations and codes to which the podiatric practice is bound
- Maintaining cultural and religious sensitivity
- Applying interpersonal skills to optimize the quality of workplace communication and interactions
- To ensure confidentiality at all times

8. Following the appropriate assessment [including sensation testing] by the supervising Podiatrist, the Footcare Assistant may prepare and apply, monitor, and remove the following modalities

- Wax baths
- Hydro-collator packs
- Ice packs

9. Following the appropriate assessment by the treating Podiatrist, the Footcare Assistant may undertake the following skills

- Routine nail care for non-pathological toe nails
- Foot hygiene tasks

10. Where the supervising Podiatrist is on-site and be available: to provide precise instruction at the time of treatment, to respond immediately to any clinical changes, and to respond to queries – the Footcare Assistant may undertake the following tasks

- Strapping of the foot and ankle
- Padding of the foot and footwear
- Reapplication of a wound dressing



The following activities **may not** be delegated to a Footcare Assistant under any circumstances. A Footcare Assistant may prepare for, but not undertake or apply:

- Debridement of callous, corns or other skin lesions
- Neutral position casting for custom orthoses
- Moulding of pre-fabricated or non-casted mouldable orthoses
- Passive movements as defined in joint manipulation/mobilisation techniques
- Interpretation of x-rays or other imaging modalities

Application or interpretation of:

- Doppler vascular studies
- Ultrasound
- Electrical stimulation (other than TENS and FAS)

The Footcare Assistant may be involved with the supervision of people receiving these treatment modalities to ensure safety. The Podiatrist must provide protocols and specific instructions for the Footcare Assistant to act in an emergency. The supervising Podiatrist must remain on-site during such treatments and be available at all times.



Bibliography

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