

Health Education England consultation paper on the future workforce of podiatry

As a Faculty we contacted our Fellows and Members asking specific questions regarding the proposals.

From the responses received there are some areas of concerns been raised. Whilst we appreciate this paper is only pertinent to England it will have ramifications on the rest of the UK workforce.

The questions posed and collated responses are as follows:

1. In order to fully protect the public do you think this sector of Foot Health provision should be regulated?

The responses indicated that this section of the foot health economy should be subject to compulsory regulation. Foot Health Practitioners can currently apply to be listed on a voluntary register administered by the Alliance of Private Sector Practitioners. This register is overseen by the Professional Standards Authority (PSA). Unfortunately, the Alliance withdrew from the Foot Health Consortium prior to the publication of the HEE Standards. This area requires to be explored further and consideration given to the future role the Health and Care Professions Council could play in the regulatory process of this level of practice.

2. Do you think the proposed standards for Assistant Practitioners at level 5 encroach upon the Undergraduate regulated role?

The Level 5 Assistant Practitioner should possess particular skills which when collated help devise the appropriate management plan. One such example is use of the doppler to determine the vascular status of the limb. It is essential the Assistant who carries out the data collection is under the supervision of a Podiatrist who can interpret the information and devise an appropriate treatment rationale. An assistant practitioner should not interpret the data, make the diagnosis, compile the management plan and refer if required. This should remain the responsibility of the Podiatrist.

3 Should the Standards proposed by Health Education England be adopted by the rest of the UK?

There was a differing response to this with some participants disagreeing but others stating to ensure consistency throughout the UK the standards should be applied across the four Home Nations however it should be recognised that Health is a devolved power and Podiatric service delivery may be entirely different in any of the Home Nations and therefore the Standards may not be applicable.

4 Do you think it is sufficient for the assistant practitioner to report to a Regulated Professional not necessarily a podiatrist?

The responses received indicated the following:

It is essential the Foot Health Practitioner/Assistant Practitioner reports to a Podiatrist to protect patient safety. The Current standards refer to the reporting mechanism for supervision to a "Registered Professional". The Registered Professional could be interpreted as a nurse or another AHP who may possess little knowledge of foot pathology let alone how to manage the condition.

5 Do you think full implementation of the Standards will have a positive or negative effect upon foot health provision within the NHS and Private sector?

The responses received had a mixed response however it was felt that if correctly managed the addition of this tier of practitioner may have a positive effect on patient care. However, there is a danger if regulation and appropriate supervision of Foot Health Practitioners and Assistant Practitioners is not implemented patient safety may be compromised.

The responses indicated that Health Education England should have gone a step further and implement the standards across both the NHS and independent sector.