

Diverse Research Result from APERF Awards

Each year the Australian Podiatry Education and Research Fund (APERF) allocates funds to peer-reviewed research applications. This research is the foundation of evidenced-based practice for the profession, leading to improved clinical care, treatments and best practice podiatry. In 2003, three new projects have been funded.

Outcomes in foot surgery – focus of podiatric surgeon

Conditions affecting the great toe joint and the surgery undertaken to alleviate them will be scrutinised by podiatric surgeon Mark Gilheany in his APERF-funded project.

Mr Gilheany says, “The great toe joint is commonly affected by conditions which can significantly impact upon quality of life (hallux limitus – restricted movement and hallux valgus – bunions). Thousands of operations to treat these conditions take place in Australia each year. The clinical literature indicates generally positive outcomes from surgery but poor outcomes do occur. Unfortunately no research has been performed which provides an indication as to which of the available procedures provides the optimal results for a given clinical circumstance.”

“The literature describes approximately 150 different variations of surgical procedures for bunions and restriction of the big toe joint,” he says. “What we don’t know is which one is most effective from a patient perspective, delivering the best outcome in terms of function, pain level and shoe fit.”

Mr Gilheany is conducting a series of studies for this project within the School of Public Health at La Trobe University, Melbourne. The primary research tool is the Foot Health Status Questionnaire (FHSQ). The project evaluates outcomes prospectively and retrospectively. Guidelines for the use of the FHSQ in respect of surgical outcomes will also be developed.

The findings from this study will add valuable knowledge to the management of a common and debilitating foot pathology. ■

Sever’s Disease Under Scrutiny

In his newly funded APERF study, South Australian-based researcher Rolf Scharfbillig will try to determine the causes and effects of Sever’s disease, a common foot complaint suffered by 8-14 years olds.



Rolf Scharfbillig

“Sever’s disease is an inflammation of the growth area of the heel,” Mr Scharfbillig says. “It manifests as heel pain which increases with activity or pressure.”

While there are many different treatments and many causes assigned to Sever’s disease, the evidence is mostly anecdotal. Mr Scharfbillig’s study will compare a group of young people with the symptoms of Sever’s disease with a group of young people who are asymptomatic.

“We will compare the two groups to see if we can identify any trends among those who suffer Sever’s disease, which may enable us to hypothesize about why some young people get it and others don’t,” he says.

The study will look at a range of factors including biomechanics, level of activity, height, weight, and quality of life, to ascertain which factors seem to play a role in the development of this condition and to measure the impact of Sever’s disease on its sufferers. ■

Diabetes Assessment in the Spotlight



Virginia Bower

Chief podiatrist at the Royal Perth Hospital, Virginia Bower, will evaluate a diabetes screening tool, in conjunction with the hospital’s Population Health Unit, in her APERF-funded research project.

“National guidelines recommend that people with diabetes should undergo foot screening every 12 months to pick up any diabetes-related foot problems,” Ms Bower says.

In order to streamline this screening process, a Basic Foot Assessment Checklist was developed by the Australasian Podiatry Council and the Australian Diabetes Educators Association. This tool was designed to enable non-podiatrists such as diabetes educators, to identify any foot

problems associated with diabetes, facilitating timely and appropriate referrals to podiatrists and enabling the prevention of lower limb amputations, an unfortunately too common complication of diabetes.

In her research project, Ms Bower will evaluate the validity and reliability of the checklist. “We want to ensure accurate screenings are actually taking place in community settings,” Ms Bower says. ■

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