



# How Do the New Pedorthic Education Standards Impact New and Existing Practitioners?

BY **CURRENT PEDORTHICS STAFF**

**R**ECENTLY, THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON ORTHOTIC AND PROSTHETIC AND EDUCATION (NCOPE) RELEASED THE NEW PEDORTHIC EDUCATIONAL MODEL AND STANDARDS THAT DETAIL THE ENHANCED PEDORTHIC CURRICULUM QUITE CLEARLY.

The Pedorthic Footcare Association (PFA) reviewed the new requirements to determine how it might impact the pedorthics field. PFA President Kristi Hayes, C.Ped., contacted NCOPE to clarify a few points within the released documents. She also contacted the American Board for Certification in Orthotics, Prosthetics and Pedorthics (ABC) and the Board for Orthotic Certification (BOC) regarding whether any of the changes in the educational model will affect certification.

The talk of a move to a one- to two-year program began in the 1990s when the Board for Certification in Pedorthics (BCP) still existed. At that time, pedorthists were concerned about the change and advanced education, as they were afraid that higher education would mean shoe store owners could not afford to educate or pay their newly educated employees. This is a common fear among all professions when they face crossroads. But for pedorthics — a small, niche profession — it was a tumultuous suggestion.

After many years, many changes and many advances in allied health professions, the pedorthics field was faced with the challenge of deciding to better educate its entrants or look into the steely eyes of eradication. Like it or not, pedorthics grew enough legs to be noticed by the government agencies and other health care professions as well as the public. With so many watching, a short and seemingly ineffective curriculum swayed in the balance.

Originally, the Commission on Accreditation on Pedorthic Education (CAPE) was charged with pedorthic curriculum and modeling, but they merged with NCOPE in 2009. NCOPE kept the CAPE committee intact under its tutelage and does all the final approving. Both CAPE and NCOPE performed a great deal of examination and investigation to make the most appropriate changes to the current system.

Involving all stakeholders, NCOPE invited all current pedorthic educators, PFA, BOC and ABC to an educational summit meeting to discuss and brainstorm ideas for the future of pedorthic education. A draft design for the future of pedorthic education, agreed upon by all groups present, came out of that meeting.

The consensus was to elevate the level of pedorthic education. NCOPE then provided a public comment period and all the groups involved in the original meeting were encouraged to send the documents to their constituents so that anyone and everyone was able to respond. Comments received back were overwhelmingly in favor of the conclusions agreed upon at the meeting.

The next step was a survey of the pedorthic profession asking questions of current pedorthic practitioners and industry professionals as to what should be included in the new curriculum. PFA sent the survey to its entire membership twice to ensure everyone had the opportunity to speak their mind, and other industry professionals and organizations did the same. While the survey yielded extremely strong and positive results in favor of a more comprehensive and well-rounded pedorthic curriculum, the results were not reflective of existing practitioners. As the new educational curriculum does not affect them directly, most credentialed pedorthists chose not to participate.

From that survey came NCOPE's final educational model, which was released in March. The release of this final set of standards is what prompted PFA to ask a few more questions so that all PFA members understand how this will work and how it might impact their practices. You can find the entire NCOPE Pedorthic Education Standards and the Core Curriculum for Pedorthics at [www.ncope.org](http://www.ncope.org).

## PFA/NCOPE Q&A

This candid question-and-answer conversation on new standards and curriculum took place between PFA President Kristi Hayes, C.Ped., and NCOPE Executive Director Robin Seabrook. To ask additional questions of NCOPE, please e-mail Seabrook at [rseabrook@ncope.org](mailto:rseabrook@ncope.org).

### **Kristi Hayes/PFA: What schools will participate in this new program?**

**Robin Seabrook/NCOPE:** All of the current pedorthics education programs were asked to submit a survey outlining their intent to meet the new standards and the key elements they need to put in place to do so. We surveyed eight programs and received seven responses. The responses break out as follows:

- Two are currently housed at an academic institution and will apply to meet the new standards;
- One program will close;
- Three want to create an affiliation with an academic institution and will do what they need to do to meet the new standards; and
- One program said it will not create an affiliation with an academic institution but stated it will not close.

**PFA:** Who has NCOPE approached to take on the program, or who has approached NCOPE with interest?

**NCOPE:** As of today, we have sent the new pedorthic standards to all of our current technician-level programs that are already housed at an academic institution. Programs that have stated an interest include Century (per the 2010 pedorthic summit), Francis Tuttle and Oklahoma State – Okmulgee.

### **PFA: What do they need to do to participate?**

**NCOPE:** They would need to develop the curriculum and make a submission identifying how they are meeting the standards in all areas.

**PFA:** The standards state that by the end of 2012, all programs must be in full compliance. Does this mean that at some point there will be a two-year gap between having new C.Peds. join our ranks?

**NCOPE:** Now until the end of 2012 is a transition period. This means that currently approved programs (the courses that were approved when CAPE came under NCOPE in 2009) may enroll graduate students through the end of 2012 using the old standards. During 2011 and 2012, we hope new courses will be developed and the current courses will apply for accreditation under the new standards. This overlap should create a seamless transition. The current programs can switch to the new standards any time they want, as long as that occurs before the end of 2012.

### **PFA: If there is a gap in new pedorthists going through the educational program and becoming credentialed, how do you feel this will impact the profession?**

**NCOPE:** As explained previously, there should not necessarily be a gap in newly certified pedorthists strictly due to the changes in the educational standards because we have allowed a generous transition period. NCOPE's understanding from what we have been hearing from pedorthic educators on the CAPE committee is that enrollment numbers are down even in the current courses. So, it is valid to have enrollment concerns, regardless of the educational standards. NCOPE cannot guarantee how the changes in the standards will affect numbers of graduates. NCOPE had the same concern with the movement to the master's in the orthotics and prosthetics (O&P) profession and so far we have seen an increase in interest from new schools interested in creating O&P educational programs. Our hope is that we will see the same thing happen in pedorthics. As for increasing the number of applicants to pedorthic programs, that is something that the PFA could work on through a marketing campaign to high school students as the American Academy for

Orthotists and Prosthetists (AAOP) has done in the O&P profession.

### **PFA: Is this a degree or a certificate program?**

**NCOPE:** The standards are designed at the certificate level housed in an academic institution. The actual wording from the standards is: "A sponsoring institution must be a post-secondary academic institution accredited by an institutional accrediting agency that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and must be authorized under applicable law or other acceptable authority to provide a post-secondary program, which awards a minimum of a certificate at the completion of the program." That does not mean that a school that develops this program cannot award an associates degree; they can, but it is not required. For our technician-level schools, some offer only the certificate and some offer the associates degree. It all depends on what the student wants to work towards and be awarded at completion.

### **PFA: Do you have a director who is indeed a credentialed pedorthist to assist and/or oversee?**

**NCOPE:** If you are referring to the NCOPE Board of Directors, then yes we have a credentialed pedorthist on our board. In our system for pedorthic accreditation, we have an entire committee (not a single director) that oversees pedorthic education/accreditation. The former CAPE merged with NCOPE in 2009 and now acts as a committee under the NCOPE umbrella. This committee was the group that developed the new standards and brought them before the NCOPE Board of Directors for adoption. This committee will be overseeing the implementation of the standards and the transition of the programs. CAPE will bring recommendations forth to the NCOPE Board of Directors, similar to the process NCOPE follows within the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) system. Every person on the CAPE committee is a certified pedorthist with

two NCOPE board liaisons (one being a C.Ped.). The chairperson of the CAPE committee acts as a liaison to the NCOPE board and attends all board meetings.

**PFA: The new educational model is stated as being “effective immediately.” How does this affect the schools currently open and offering pedorthic education?**

**NCOPE:** For any new programs that pursue accreditation by NCOPE, they would have to meet the new education standards “effective immediately.” The current programs have until the end of 2012 to reapply and meet the new standards or no longer offer their course if they know they cannot meet the standards.

**PFA: How should the current schools navigate the new standards and what options are available to them to participate in the new education model?**

**NCOPE:** They would need to make application and address, through a self-study process, how they are meeting the new standards. For those schools that choose to participate, we are taking steps to assist them in the process. The survey we sent is intended to get them thinking about what they need to do to make the transition. It lets NCOPE know where the starting point is so that we can gauge their progress. We also are hoping to be able to provide them with information regarding institutions to connect with to meet the requirement to be affiliated with a degree-granting institute of higher learning.

**PFA: If current schools are out of business, does that mean there will be no new credentialed pedorthists until a new school gets up to speed?**

**NCOPE:** In theory, that could happen. But it is unlikely because two of the programs say they will be continuing their programs (Northwestern University and Temple University) and three have stated their desire to make a connection with an academic institution to continue their programs.

## PFA/ABC and BOC Q&A

On behalf of the PFA membership, PFA President Kristi Hayes, C.Ped., asked the following questions to both credentialing bodies in pedorthics. Cathy Carter, ABC executive director, and Claudia Zacharias, BOC CEO, responded. If you have additional questions, you can e-mail Carter at ccarter@abcop.org and

Zacharias at claudia.zacharias@bocusa.org.

**Kristi Hayes/PFA:** There is a prefabricated AFO section in the new educational standards. Will this mean an expansion of the scope of practice for ABC certified pedorthists? For BOC pedorthists, AFO is already a part of the scope of practice; will this expand it any further or remain the same?

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# NEW PEDORTHIC EDUCATION STANDARDS

**Cathy Carter/ABC:** Section 10.0 of the new NCOPE standards for educational programs in pedorthics does not suggest or support an expansion of the C.Ped. scope of practice because these items are already in the scope of practice. The ABC Orthotic, Prosthetic and Pedorthic Scope of Practice already states: “The profession of pedorthics is the provision of patient care and services by or under the direction and supervision of an

Therefore, no expansion of the scope of practice is required.

**Claudia Zacharias/BOC:** As you have noted, BOC’s Scope of Practice already included this important area, so this change, as we understand it, does not affect currently certified BOC pedorthists. Future changes to BOC’s Scope of Practice, if any, would be determined after the next Job Task Analysis (JTA). In alignment

is no need for additional coursework beyond the continuing education requirements that are already in place for all BOC certifications.

**PFA:** ABC requires 1,000 hours of clinical experience to be completed before, during or after the pedorthic education takes place. Will the 1,000-hour requirement be reduced or dropped with the new educational model in place?

**ABC:** As professions increase their education, it is common for those who might have had “less” education mentor or train those who now have “more” education. It’s important to recognize that the classroom or didactic learning is not the only kind of learning happening in the profession. The practical training which is provided by experienced practitioners provides a valuable part of the newcomer’s “education” and prepares them to be independent, decision-making care providers. The experienced practitioner may have less formal education but has years of experience, years of various types of continuing education and the credentialing process which all combined allow him/her to provide clinical training to someone with only a classroom education. This is part of the evolution of all professions that increase their educational requirements. ■



ABC certified pedorthist to provide the application of a pedorthic device for the prevention or amelioration of painful and/or disabling conditions of the foot and ankle. A prescription is required for any pedorthic device, modification and/or prefabricated below the knee orthosis addressing a medical condition that originates at the ankle or below.” Section 10.0 of the new NCOPE standards states: “Formulate comprehensive pedorthic treatment plans to meet patient needs and achieve goals using the following prefabricated AFO devices (the goal of a pedorthic AFO device is the treatment of foot pathologies): 1. Night splint, 2. Boot type AFO (pressure relief or pneumatic walker).” The types of orthoses referenced in the standards are currently already within the scope of practice of a C.Ped. provided they are addressing a medical condition that originates at the ankle or below.

with psychometrically sound practices, we conduct a JTA for each of our certifications at least once every five years.

**PFA:** Now that there is a higher level of primary education required, will existing credentialed pedorthists continue with business as usual or will they be required to take additional courses to remain certified? **ABC:** Certified pedorthists will continue as usual; the new educational requirements do not affect current practitioners. Existing certified pedorthists will simply continue on with maintaining their credential through continuing education courses each year.

**BOC:** After having successfully completed all certification requirements, BOC pedorthists already have demonstrated competence in BOC’s Scope of Practice. Consequently, there

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