

**PODIATRY BOARD
OF
SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

**Policy
For Registered Podiatrists**

RE: Assistants in Podiatry Practice

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1. Introduction

This document is the policy of the Podiatry Board of South Australia on the employment and use of assistants (or support staff) by registered podiatrists.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Board's Code of Professional Conduct & Practice.

This policy is the standard against which a registered podiatrist will be evaluated in relation to the use of assistants in their practice.

For the purpose of this document, the term "assistant" will be used and "registered/ supervising/ treating practitioner" will mean a "podiatrist" registered under the Act.

2. Definition

An assistant is a member of staff employed within a facility or private practice who assists the registered practitioner in the efficient delivery of their services to their patients.

The extent to which the assistant can be involved in treatment is defined in this document.

The supervising practitioner is required to comply with the requirements of the Board's Code of Professional Conduct & Practice.

The registered practitioner is always directly accountable for the scope of practice of the assistant and the care the patient receives and is vicariously liable for the conduct of the assistant.

3. Role responsibilities

3.1 Role responsibilities of employer

The employer has an obligation to provide an environment to ensure the following role responsibilities can be fulfilled.

3.2 Role responsibilities of the registered practitioner

The registered practitioner has the responsibility to ensure that:

- The assistant is clearly and correctly identified as an assistant.
- The assistant understands the scope and limits of their responsibilities.
- The assistant is trained to the appropriate level of competence for the tasks required in that facility.
- The assistant is provided with clear direction of the work to be undertaken.
- There are clearly defined lines of communication and delegation.
- The quality of the work of the assistant is regularly evaluated to ensure they are safe, effective, efficient and competent.
- At no time is an assistant to be requested or required to undertake a task which is outside their competence and cannot be delegated as defined in this policy.

3.3 Role responsibilities of the assistant

The assistant must:

- Respect the rights and dignity of all individuals and be sensitive to their needs.
- Maintain confidentiality of patient information.
- Recognise the extent and limitations of their role responsibilities and only undertake activities that they are competent and delegated to perform.
- Maintain high standards of personal behaviour and conduct.
- Display professionalism toward other health providers.

4. Employment of podiatry students as assistants

Podiatry students should not undertake employment where their developing knowledge as a student is being used to fulfil tasks that would normally be undertaken only by a registered practitioner.

Registered practitioners who employ podiatry students as assistants must adhere to this Policy of the Board.

5. Training of assistants

Formal training for assistants should be encouraged to ensure an appropriate knowledge base and minimum standards of practice. Assistants should complete the A Pod A [SA] Assistants Course or equivalent study as determined by the registered practitioner/board.

Additional competence based training is required to meet the specific requirements of the particular workplace. A training log and written procedures should be made available to the assistant where applicable.

A review of performance should be conducted annually.

6. Supervision of assistants

The assistant is professionally responsible to and must work under the direction and supervision of a designated registered practitioner.

Supervision may be direct or indirect as identified by the registered practitioner and may depend on:

- Practice setting and type of service
- The nature of the task
- The acuity and/or stability of the patient's condition
- The complexity of the patient's needs
- The level of competence of the assistant

The lines of responsibility must be clearly defined both in terms of employment, in relation to the supervising practitioner and in keeping with roles as defined in the policy. An assistant must have:

- a specifically designated podiatrist supervisor
- documented instructions from the supervising practitioner which are regularly reviewed

7. Reporting Processes

Where the assistant may be undertaking administrative activities away from the direct supervision of the registered practitioner the job description should specify:

- the required methods, content and frequency of reporting
- the process for reporting emergency situations to the appropriate health care professional

8. Roles of assistants

8.1 Tasks/treatment techniques which must not be delegated to assistants

The assistant **must not** under any circumstances:

- interpret referrals for podiatry
- interpret diagnosis or prognosis
- interpret assessment findings
- undertake complex treatment procedures
- conduct formal history taking with patients
- undertake assessment procedures
- develop a physical diagnosis
- plan treatment programs
- institute or modify treatment programs
- Offer advice with respect to conditions for the management of foot or leg complaints

The registered practitioner must apply the following procedures:

- Assess the client prior to the initial treatment and provide an appropriate care plan.
- The assistant must be trained in the correct and safe treatment protocol.
- The treatment must be clearly delineated by the treating practitioner.
- Undertake all warning and safety procedures; instruct the patient in the contraindications and the expected reactions of the technique to be applied.
- Reassess the patient at least annually for the condition being treated.

The registered practitioner bears full responsibility for the use and application of any treatment.

The following activities must not be delegated to an assistant or any other person who is not a registered practitioner or a student on supervised clinical practice, under any circumstances. Thus, an assistant must not apply:

- Examination of the patient including biomechanical, muscular, orthopaedic, neurological, vascular or dermatological examination
- gait analysis using visual, computerised or video assessment techniques
- casting
- orthotic dispense and reviews
- treatment involving the use of a scalpel
- injections or operations

The assistant may supervise the safety and comfort of clients during treatment or examination. The registered practitioner must provide specific instructions for the assistant to act in an emergency whilst summoning assistance. In the event of the occurrence of pain, discomfort or unexpected changes the matter must be reported to the treating practitioner immediately. The supervising practitioner must remain on-site during treatment and be available to respond immediately.

8.2 Tasks/treatment techniques which may be delegated to assistants

The assistant may undertake non-treatment activities as required by the service, such as:

- escorting patients
- reception of patients
- preparing patients for podiatry and aiding dressing following treatment
- preparing and maintaining equipment required for treatment
- conducting infection control tasks, including instrument cleaning and sterilisation

The assistant may undertake receptionist, clerical and housekeeping duties according to the requirements of the service subject to the processes and procedures specified by the registered practitioner. Such processes and procedures should be developed in accordance with acceptable standards of:

- patient safety
- quality assurance
- award conditions of employment
- occupational health, safety and welfare considerations

The assistant may also assist the podiatrist:

- preparing the consultation area
- in generating and maintaining medical records
- with patient administration, such as collection of demographic data

Following the appropriate patient assessment by the treating practitioner, the assistant may:

- apply basic dressings and padding and strapping under the direction of the practitioner
- assist the practitioner during minor skin and nail procedures
- assist the practitioner with orthoses or footwear modifications under the direction of the practitioner
- perform basic foot hygiene on low risk patients as determined by the treating podiatrist

Note: 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 superficial dead skin material via manual abrasive methods, and the application of drying or softening agents. Treatment should not involve the use of scalpels or podiatry drills.