A history of podiatry and chiropody

What is the difference between podiatry and chiropody is a frequently asked question. The answer to this is in how the profession has evolved and the training a clinician has had.

At the Podiatry and Chiropody Clinic, Martin and Angie Parry have BSc (Hons) Podiatry degrees and specialise in lower limb biomechanics and orthotic therapy. Podiatry degrees have been taught since 1992 and there are 13 podiatry schools in the country. Podiatry evolved from chiropody.

Chiropody in Greek means ‘care of the hands and feet’. In the past there were several different ways a person could train to become a chiropodist either in a college, a foot hospital or through weekend and correspondence courses. Consequently, there were discrepancies between the standard of these training courses. To eliminate the disparity of the standard of training the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists (SCP) initiated a podiatry degree in the early 1990’s. The degree was a three year science degree with honours in podiatry alternatively known as podiatric medicine. Whereas chiropody was known for ‘caring for the hands and feet’ podiatry means ‘foot doctor’ and is medicine of the lower limb as well as foot.

At the point of the introduction of the BSc (Hons) Podiatry, existing chiropodists were informed that if they wanted to continue calling themselves chiropodists they would be required to do extra study to affiliate themselves with the professional title chiropodist or newly named podiatrist. Many of them did, but the ones who did not, could only continue to practice under the title of ‘Foot health care practitioner’ and are not registered with the Health Professions Council (HPC).

So who calls themselves a chiropodist or podiatrist? Existing chiropodists were happy to continue with the name of the profession that they and the public were used to, whereas graduates call themselves podiatrists. Theoretically chiropody and podiatry mean the same, although podiatry is recognised internationally and is used by the NHS, but as explained the training can vary vastly between professionals and the connotations of the words have different meanings to different people.

On the whole we find that the general public are unaware of what podiatrists do and what can be done for a multitude of foot pain and problems that extend to the knee, hip and lower back.

Martin and Angie’s degree training was extensive and covered medicine, pharmacology and all systemic illnesses that can affect the lower limb of which there are many. This includes vascular, neurological, musculoskeletal, dermatological and endocrine conditions. Their third year tutor was a world leader in his field of diabetes and covered the subject with a passion. Martin and Angie both have anaesthetising licences for nail surgery. Today they specialise in biomechanics and orthotics, this stems from learning how to make bespoke orthotics from scratch and therefore they have an excellent understanding of how they work and their purpose. Today they use high tech companies to make the devices.

We love our profession and find it fascinating and we continue our professional development (CPD) by attending regular courses. We do a lot more than cut and file nails!