

Podiatrist leaves her footprints on the web, too

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MERIDEN — Dr. Tina A. Boucher started her podiatry practice a couple of years ago from scratch, which for a doctor means with no patients, so it's probably no surprise, pardon the pun, that she's willing to take the extra step.

For Boucher, a 1990 Platt High School graduate who returned to Meriden after completing her medical studies, that extra step includes writing a small book, or pamphlet, called "Why Do My Feet Hurt?" and making it available free of charge to her patients and anyone else seeking answers to the question. Five hundred copies have been printed.

"I think educating the public is the best marketing tool," said Boucher.

Along with the booklet, Boucher's practice issues a printed newsletter, a Web site (from which the book can be ordered) at [www.CentralCTFootCare.com](http://www.CentralCTFootCare.com), and an online blog. She's a frequent contributor to the Hartford Women's Journal, and is planning to write an additional booklet, this time focusing on heel pain, in the next few months. It's called "Heal My Heel!"

She also finds time to provide her services at nursing homes, participates in "lunch and learn" programs and makes other public appearances and book signings. On Tuesday, she'll talk about summer foot care at the Wallingford Public Library, in a program beginning at 6:30 p.m.

September, she said, is "a huge month for heel pain," basically because people have been padding around all summer in less than ideal footwear.

"I call it the flip-flop syndrome," she said.

Much of her extra office activity is to promote her practice, which judging by patient traffic on a recent morning is quite healthy, but the purpose is also to clear up typical misunderstandings about disorders affecting the feet and to let people know that there are effective treatments available.

In charge of much of Boucher's outreach efforts, including the Web site, the blog, the newsletter, and on Facebook, is Jenn Zemke, a 2004 Platt graduate Boucher met at a dance class.

"Basically, she said she was waiting for me," said Zemke, who graduated from Quinnipiac University last year with a degree in journalism and a degree in history. Zemke has also worked as a Record-Journal intern.

"We also do birthday cards for our patients," said Zemke, Boucher's project manager.

Foot problems and the ability to treat them is something Boucher knows from personal experience. She was born with no skin on her feet, the effect of a condition called Bart's Syndrome, and visits to the podiatrist as a child were routine.

"I know how confusing it can be to people to understand what is going on with their bodies," she writes in the introduction to her pamphlet. "Feet and ankles can be especially frustrating because of the number of ailments that can occur in those areas. Most people in their lifetime will have a foot or ankle condition."

Podiatrists offer a range of services to a diverse population covering all age ranges, including examinations, surgery and prescribing orthotics and custom-made shoes. Podiatrists are also often the first to identify certain diseases, including diabetes.

There are just about 15,000 doctors of podiatric medicine practicing in the U.S., and just eight colleges of podiatric medicine. After graduating from McGill University, in Canada, Boucher attended the Temple University School of Podiatric Medicine, in Philadelphia. Her three-year surgical residency was at Benedictine Hospital, in Kingston, N.Y.

Boucher said she had employment offers from around the country, but after being away so long “I was just ready to come home.” A lot of her new business is from patient referral. “It’s amazing how small the community still is,” she said.

For Boucher, proper foot care is a quality of life issue.

“To me, that’s the whole thing,” she said. “People who have issues with their feet, they suffer unnecessarily.”

For many, it’s also become an economic necessity in these troubled financial times.

“I’m finding that some patients are coming in because they have to be working,” she said. “I have a lot more proactive patients now, because of the economy, and they’re afraid of losing their jobs.”