

A POLITICIANS SHOES CAN BE UNCOMFORTABLE!

Come in and find
out ways we can
help you and the...



- **NHS**
- **BENEFIT SYSTEM**
- **FOOTWEAR INDUSTRY**
- **INDEPENDENT RETAILERS**
- **GREAT BRITISH PUBLIC**

A non-profit organisation assisting the trade and public since 1959

www.shoefitters-uk.org

**The Society of Shoe Fitters would formally like to thank Minister
George Freeman MP
for kindly agreeing to host and attend our afternoon tea**

POLITICALLY CORRECT FOOTWEAR

**Dining Room B,
Wednesday 28th October 2015
4.00 p.m. - 6.00 p.m.**

**Thank you to everyone attending, to those who have contributed
to this informative handout, also the many
that have written in support of the S.S.F.
Their letters will be available to view at our event.**

**May we also thank those MP's who have confirmed their attendance
and those who are intending to 'pop in'.
You will be assured of a warm welcome, photo opportunity
and Press Release for media and social networking.**

**Our contact details are:
Secretary – Laura West
Email: secretary@shoefitters-uk.org
Tel. 01953-851171**

WHO ARE WE:

The Society of Shoe Fitters is a not-for-profit organisation, started in 1959 and run by a voluntary Council with professional Secretary.

WHAT DO WE DO?:

Train those involved with footwear and foot health how to understand measurement and the fit of footwear to a professional and recognised standard. We use the income from our Footwear & Fitting Course to provide the public with a free helpline, foot-health education material, footwear and business advice to the trade and industry and provide **NATIONAL SHOE FITTING WEEK** –a national footwear and fitting public health education programme for all.

WHO DO WE WORK WITH?:

We work with the footwear industry, public, media and numerous charities.

WHAT DO WE NEED FROM THE GOVERNMENT?

- OFFICIAL RECOGNITION – a recognised endorsement/stamp of approval for our services to the public and industry.
- SUPPORT and co-operation for - NATIONAL SHOE FITTING WEEK – and greater education for the public - in particular young parents.
- A Government Health Warning to accompany all children's footwear.
- An Education Department directive for schools to STOP CARPETING FLOORS! Children should not be wearing plimsolls and slippers all day – it is unhealthy and dangerous on many levels, can significantly compromise the development of children's feet and gait, wastes parents money and would breach Health & Safety in any workplace - why should schools be different?
- SUPPORT for a new Orthopaedic Footwear Course.
- Discuss the possibility of linking the purchase of professionally fitted children's shoes with Child Benefit payments.

Shoes are the only item of clothing that can seriously damage health for life costing the NHS huge amounts in remedial care.

The Society of Shoe Fitters and its membership offer preventative medicine that could save £ millions.

PROFESSOR WESLEY VERNON OBE (Health Professional)
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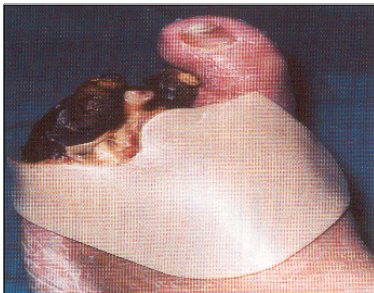


Problems with Footwear

Footwear has become so universally worn in our society that shoes can almost be seen as an integral part of the body. As an interface between individual and environment, footwear has an important protective function and in this role shoes are subject to high levels of stress and strain. Most shoes therefore need to be manufactured from robust materials capable of resisting damage. However, the strength and resilience of these materials can cause problems to the foot where there are mismatches between foot and shoe shape. The dictates of fashion can also create further imbalances between foot and shoe morphology.

In a healthy person such mismatches can lead to pain and discomfort with the formation of associated skin lesions and permanent foot deformation leading to further problems in matching foot and shoe together.

In someone with conditions placing the foot at risk (e.g. diabetes or circulatory impairment) serious problems can arise from inappropriately matched feet and shoes including foot ulceration, infection and gangrene.



These problems often require health intervention and are costly in terms of resources and human misery.

Statistical data/facts about foot health in the UK including footwear involvement and costs - the following information shows the prevalence of foot health problems in the UK, the potential for footwear involvement and the associated level of costs to the health economy for the healthy and at-risk populations:

THE PREVALENCE OF FOOT PROBLEMS IN THE UK

- 50% to 90% of the elderly have a foot problem (Munro, Steel, 1998, Harvey, Frankel, 1997, Cartwright, Henderson, 1986, Clarke, 1969)
- Data last collected Nationally (England & Wales) suggested that 3.28% of the total population were receiving NHS-based podiatry treatment (KT23, 2002)

THE INVOLVEMENT OF FOOTWEAR IN RELATION TO FOOT HEALTH PROBLEMS

- Research has highlighted the effects of external influence on the foot (including footwear) and has demonstrated that such problems should be preventable (Vernon, 2004, 2000, Joyce, 2000, Menz, Lord, 1999, Munro, Steele, 1998, Nancarrow, 1999,)
- It has previously been suggested that over 70% of those with foot conditions have problems either directly or indirectly related to their footwear (Kemp & Winkler 1983).
- One survey showed that 95% of patients with foot problems wore shoes that were too short (Prior, 2004)

THE AT-RISK DIABETIC POPULATION

- The known diagnosed population with diabetes in the UK is 3.9 million: 6% of the population (Diabetes UK, 2014). By 2025 it is estimated that 5 million people will have diabetes in the UK (Diabetes UK, 2015)
- 2.5% of people with diabetes will have foot ulceration at any one time suggesting that there are approx. 80,000 people with foot ulcers in the UK (Diabetes UK, 2015)
- Diabetic foot ulceration most common cause of amputation in the UK (Amputee Statistical Database UK, 2007). Only 2/3 of diabetic foot ulcers heal without surgery. Up to 28% result in some form of amputation and around 6000 people with diabetes have leg foot or toe amputations each year in England (Kerr, 2012)
- 50% of these amputees die within two years and up to 80% die within five years of having an amputation (Diabetes UK, 2013)

COSTS OF TREATMENT

- Podiatry provision – typically around £25/patient treatment with the total cost across UK – being perhaps in excess of £220 million?
- In 2010-11, the NHS in England spent an estimated £639 million–£662 million, 0.6–0.7% of its budget, on diabetic foot ulceration and amputation (Kerr, 2012)
- The estimated cost of community and out-patient care for diabetic foot ulceration = £306,508,970 and the cost of in-patient care for diabetic foot ulceration & amputation = £256,698,817 (Kerr, 2012)
- The estimated cost of post-amputation care for people with diabetes = £75,807,423 (Kerr, 2012)

Considered together these data show that there is a high prevalence of foot problems in the UK, that footwear contributes to these problems and that the costs of managing these problems once they have occurred are high.

HOW THE FOOTWEAR INDUSTRY IS ABLE TO HELP WITH THESE ISSUES

Health care professionals usually become involved after footwear problems have manifested themselves in the patient. Shoe fitters however are perfectly placed to help members of the public obtain footwear that is appropriate to their needs and which facilitates good foot health through ensuring optimal fit. **The Society of Shoe Fitters (SSF) is the only professional organisation in the UK for shoe fitters and plays a lead role in promoting the need for shoes to be fitted correctly by trained professionals.** New initiatives such as the Healthy Footwear Guide Scheme a collaboration between the footwear industry and foot health clinicians, also exists to promote the need for and recognition of healthy footwear. The College of Podiatry has a footwear special interest group for practitioners working to improve foot health through raising awareness and sharing knowledge in this area. These new initiatives recognise the importance of the role of the SSF in helping achieve optimal shoe fit within the population **and through this the potential of shoe fitters to improve the foot health of the nation.**

CONCERNS RELATING TO THE FOOTWEAR INDUSTRY

There are a number of particular concerns in relation to the footwear industry today which impact on foot health. The key issues are:

- The complexity of shoe fitting
- Low membership of the SSF (and therefore low numbers of shoe fitters)
- Poor public awareness of footwear issues in relation to health

- Online selling of footwear that has not been correctly fitted
- A disconnect between a number of footwear manufacturers and the impact of footwear on foot health

WHAT SUPPORT IS NEEDED?

The following areas of potential support would be of help in improving foot health in the UK:

- Incorporating shoe fitting expertise into the NHS/health care practice
- The availability of research and development funding specifically for proposals in relation to the role of shoe fitting and foot health
- Funding for projects to raise awareness of the relationship between footwear and foot health including the National Shoe Fitting Week and the potential risks of purchasing footwear without the aid of professional fitting services
- Legislation to ensure that those involved in shoe fitting are appropriately trained and regulated

WHAT WILL IMPROVE IF THIS IS ACHIEVED?

All of the above suggestions have the potential to:

- Improve self-care and self-awareness in relation to the association between footwear and foot health
- Improve the foot health of the population
- Reduce the dependency on health care services for problems associated with ill-fitting footwear
- Through improved foot health, more effective and efficient NHS services and lower costs to the NHS and the UK tax payer

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WE ARE NOT ALL BORN WITH PERFECT FEET....

The College of Podiatry and the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists fully supports and endorses the work of the Society of Shoe Fitters and the very valuable contribution good shoe fitting makes to the health of our nation.

There is a very good reason for this. Although Footwear is rarely the primary cause of foot pathology, poor fitting and inappropriate footwear exaggerates and exacerbates these problems. This is particularly important with children. Wolff's law¹ of bone formation tells us that bone is formed according to the forces applied to it particularly following injury, but more importantly in growth. It is essential then that young feet are allowed to grow and develop in their own unique way.

There is a growing trend to buy children's shoes off the internet or by mail order, without seeking any fitting advice or knowing if they are appropriate. Not only is this storing up problems for later life but by changing walking patterns in the person concerned, it can affect normal development as a whole e.g. through reduced physical activity.

We are not all born with perfect feet. Every foot is unique and certainly not everyone can wear fashionable shoes. A good shoe fitter is able to advise on fitting for comfort as well as style.

Podiatrists are on the front line in tackling foot health issues. We know for instance that people who have fore foot lesions such as corns, calluses and deformities are much more likely to fall (Menz et al 2006²), and properly fitting footwear plays an integral part in combating this.

We also see the most fragile of feet as in diabetes. Not everyone with diabetes will have complications, particularly if they stay healthy. It is very useful to any podiatry practice to be able to refer patients to a good well qualified shoe fitter who will help to keep our patients on their feet and active and hopefully free of the very expensive and life changing foot complications that can occur with this condition.

Shoes have been around since man began walking upright. Everyone has to wear something on their feet and though we all like to look our best, comfortable and functional feet are essential for a healthy and active life.

References

¹**Julius Wolff (1836 –1902) German surgeon and scientist**

²[Menz H.B.](#), [Morris M.E.](#), [Lord S.R.](#). (2006) *Foot and ankle risk factors for falls in older people: a prospective study.* J Gerontol A Biol Sci Med Sci. Aug; 61(8):866-70.

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FOR THE WANT OF A HORSE-SHOE NAIL....

Why did we not heed the Munro Report? The report stated that ***'footwear is vital to a person's physiology and good footwear and shoe fitting should be taken seriously and protected for the good of the nation'***. The report spelt out what would happen if footwear and specialist retailers were ignored, sadly it was right! As an MP we appreciate you have the weight of the countries problems on your shoulders (more accurately your feet!) so shoes and foot health won't be high on your list of priorities; however it is often the seemingly insignificant things that make a huge difference to a lot of lives.

Please be assured the aims of the Society of Shoe Fitters are not trivial. I have been in the footwear industry for 36 years and have had the pleasure (and stress) of running this organisation together with a knowledgeable voluntary Council for over 26 years. The calls and messages we receive are heart-breaking. From the 80+ year old who has not been out of her flat for months because her shoes have fallen apart (*Salvation Army contacted*) to those with 'Restricted Growth', Lymphoedema and Diabetic complications. The S.S.F. is now in its 56th year of assisting the public and industry as a not-for-profit organisation (*which is worse than being a charity as you get no help whatsoever even though you still have to balance the books!*). When I started in the industry (1978) it was a 4 day week and everyone said 'it could never be as bad as that again' but it is far worse! Numerous manufacturers have closed; independent shoe shops are closing weekly, and with them go a free public service - storing up more trouble for the NHS.

The public do not realise that shoes are not just an accessory and assume people who use a measure or work in a shoe shop know about feet and footwear – WRONG! **Footwear is the only item of clothing that can serious damage your health for life - BUT NO-ONE TELLS US THAT** - not the paediatricians, health visitors, GP's, clinicians or teachersbut how could they know? No-one in authority warns parents that it is vital to have children's feet measured and fitted regularly, or informs senior patients that the reason their hips, knees, back, neck or feet are in pain is because they are wearing either the wrong type of footwear, or that the footwear they are wearing is fitted incorrectly. **There is no legal obligation to know anything about feet or footwear to sell shoes** – there is only a moral obligation which most ignore!

No two pairs of feet are the same, no two gauges are the same and no two pairs of shoes fit the same. An intelligent adult can make a decision about shoe buying and will know if their shoes hurt but are prepared to take the responsibility if they want them enough, but a diabetic cannot be sure and needs professional help as they have less sensitive feet, a person with Lymphoedema cannot be sure as their feet change throughout the day, and children are dependent upon their parents to keep them safe, etc. Unfortunately the majority of young parents are only aware of fashion. How many parents examine their childs feet, or notice if their child walks strangely? If their gait pattern if not corrected early on it could mean other joints in the body are wearing unnaturally. This is why we lobby schools to stop carpeting. It is a costly and unhealthy thing to do on so many levels. Children need supportive footwear, not plimsolls and trainers. It is a knock-on effect – problem feet/gait = visit to GP = trip to hospital £££. Every hospital works differently and they do their best, some offer bespoke shoes, some an orthotic, but most don't work with professional shoe fitters, they go ahead making expensive shoes or orthotics that don't fit into mainstream shoes, when often a mainstream shoe with small orthotic would suffice.

There are no statistics for the waste of resources but both health professionals and good shoe retailers know it is vast. The health service needs directives to all orthopaedic departments.

Every year the SSF receives hundreds of calls asking for assistance, referrals from the B.F.A., and the website thousands of hits. Nearly all callers say *'we wish we had known about you earlier, you are the only people to understand and help'*. We offer a FREE helpline and foot health education material as well as a myriad of advice regarding feet and footwear. In a bid to educate the public the SSF started a national advertising campaign with only £2,000 and lots of goodwill – National Shoe Fitting Week. This struck a chord with health professionals. The Society of Chiropodists & Podiatrists now sends over 11,000 posters to their members and the Institute of Chiropodists have promised to help too.

So why are we asking the government for help? Why not just charge more for our training to support our health education? We have to keep our costs low because the majority of shops are struggling and only pay the minimum wage, therefore staff may not remain loyal. **Unless you have had the training you do not realise the benefits**, very much chicken and egg, but we find that those we have trained recommend us which speaks volumes. **Training can only be offset against tax if you are an existing business**, ironic as it is new 'start-up' businesses that need training most because they know nothing. Our training gives a firm foundation to a new business, confidence and the best chance to make a go of things and pass on knowledge to the public. Some manufacturers pay a little for Associate Membership but we cannot be seen to be biased to a brand, therefore it is difficult to accept sponsorship. Our charges barely allow us to break even.

Thousands of shoes made of inferior materials are now imported and sold through fashion chains without any warning or advice. Many assume the footwear industry is rich but the trade is greatly divided - 1% couture – 34% quality – 65% fashion. The only sector making large amounts is own brand fashion (*import them for the cheapest bowl of rice, stack them high, sell them cheap, put them in landfill quickly so the public buy more*) **'fit' does not come into the equation**. Independent shoe shops cannot compete, but when they close free professional advice and the brands offering 'properly constructed' footwear that support the foot, go with them.

Why should you care? Because it is costing the tax payer and NHS a fortune! If the public were warned about the dangers of ill fitting footwear many more parents would prevent the aches and pains that GP's have to deal with. Hospitals would perform fewer operations (there are 135 foot amputations weekly as well as hundreds of back, knee and hip operations that may have been prevented). With diabetes and obesity increasing 60% in the past 10 years (*Diabetes UK*) the problems can only become more serious. We need to keep people mobile and safe. **Too many people linger on Benefits and long term sick because they are immobile due to aches and pains, much of which could have been prevented**. If you are immobile you put on weight, excessive weight leads to diabetes and the cost to the NHS exorbitant.

Whichever government department you are involved in – Health, Education, or Business, Innovation & Skills, **this affects you**. **Please work with us so that we can mutually support one another, our members are amazing!**

Please remember: - Whether we like it or not footwear affects our health and well-being and **the government has a duty to educate and make the public aware of this**. Shoes are not just an accessory like hats and bags. Unlike book and record shops our members are not offering a basic commodity we offer a knowledgeable and valuable service to keep people safe and well.

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FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE...

Millions of pounds are wasted by the NHS every year due to lack of foot health education.

The NHS always boasted care “From the cradle to the grave” but it is sadly lacking on the health promotion of feet and footwear.

If feet are looked after particularly in their development and monitored into senior years, many problems are preventable. Early diagnosis for children with foot problems saves future intervention. If parents were given information at the birth of their child about the importance of having feet professionally measured and fitted, it would help tremendously.

Chronic illness such as Diabetes need podiatry input to prevent amputation and even death.

Currently we do not have the resources at present to deal with the ‘root causes’, so spend millions treating people once the problems arise – which invariably they will.

With the help of the SSF we can prevent many foot conditions with footwear that is expertly fitted.

We need to stop being REACTIVE and start being PROACTIVE to stop the current situation.

MRS. MAUREEN UNSWORTH

F.S.S.F.

Senior Tutor, Fellow and Past President of the Society of Shoe Fitters

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One small step.....

.....is all it takes to launch a child on the journey of a lifetime.

Those first small steps form a blueprint for the rest of their life and consequently correct footwear will be a deciding factor in their future foot health. In some cases this journey through to adulthood may be fraught with many physical and biological hazards requiring surgical intervention and there is within the medical profession the technology to deal with such issues where necessary.

What we do not currently have is the ability to provide new feet. We subject them to enormous stress on a daily basis and therefore some questions need to be addressed.

How can we ensure good foot health from infancy to old age?

The simple answer to this question is... **to make everyone aware of the importance of ensuring that feet are measured and fitted by a qualified shoe fitter.**

The Society of Shoe Fitters offers comprehensive courses designed to train anyone who is involved in the shoe trade and health industries - shoe fitters, podiatrists, technicians etc. – anyone and everyone involved in footwear and promoting all aspects of foot health.

Investing in this knowledge will be invaluable in promoting better awareness of correctly fitted footwear.

As Course Tutors for the Society it is our aim to promote professionalism across the industry ensuring that from infancy through to maturity this one small step becomes.....

One giant leap towards better foot health for the sake of all.

We hope that you will guide our steps in the right direction to ensure the longevity of our wonderful organisation to the benefit of many thousands of others in the future.



CHARLES DENTON (Footwear Professional)

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Managing Director - Shoe manufacturer (D.B. Shoes, Rushden)

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Introduction

Our feet are remarkable – they are complex structures supporting our body and transporting us over all terrains – yet we pay little attention to their health.

How often have you heard people say at an end of an evening “*my feet are killing me*”?

Throughout life feet get squashed and squeezed into pointed toes, high heels and ill-fitting footwear which inevitably over time cause considerable foot health problems costing the NHS £millions in dealing with cases from bunion operations, to broken hips – most of which has been caused by poor fitting footwear / poor footwear advice.



As a manufacturer of specialist wide fitting footwear in Northamptonshire we work with retailers that specialise in shoe fitting. Finding suitable specialist retailers is increasingly difficult due to many reasons, one of which is the cost of training members of staff. The Society of Shoe Fitters is the only organisation training qualified shoe fitters.

Members of the general public actively seek advice from the Society of Shoe Fitters who are able to point consumers in the right direction to get appropriate footwear fitted by qualified shoe fitters.

What is required?

- 1) A national education program promoting foot health and shoe fitting
- 2) Support of the organisations that can deliver on this program cost effectively

The Society of Shoe Fitters

The Society of Shoe Fitters has national reach into all sectors of the footwear retail industry from independents to multiple retailers. The Society trains shop staff, podiatrists etc. to become qualified shoe fitters and have a better understanding of the foot and footwear. Given more resources it can very cost effectively train more people to become shoe fitters and spread the message about wearing appropriate footwear. The Society operates at the retail interface and through its members can actively influence purchasers into wearing more suitable footwear.

Results

Supporting the Society of Shoe Fitters would improve the knowledge of footwear amongst the population and reduce the burden on the NHS.

“We take our feet for granted – we abuse them at our peril”

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THE GROWING FOOT AND SHOE FITTING

Foot facts

- Feet walk approx. 70,000 miles in a lifetime. Leonardo da Vinci called the foot a masterpiece of engineering.
- Each foot has 26 bones, 19 muscles, over 100 ligaments and thousands of nerve endings.
- The average adult can take in excess of 18,000 steps a day and it's even more for children.
- At birth the foot contains 22 partially developed bones (cartilage and gristle); by school age this number will increase to 45.
- Over the next 13 to 14 years many of these will fuse together to form the **26 bones that make up the mature adult foot.**
- Many children suffer foot problems by their early teens, often associated with ill-fitting shoes.

As podiatrists we need to prevent this happening....but how do we ensure these deformities do not occur? One approach is from an early age people use a reputable trained children's shoe fitter to ensure that the child's foot fits the shoe correctly. A qualified shoe fitter can often spot a problem and refer to a podiatrist or other health professional before the problem becomes too serious.



We are luckier than many towns to have an independent retailer in Rushden, Northants who offers a comprehensive fitting service for children. They provide measurement of the foot, fitting and advice because they have a Qualified Shoe Fitter (member of the SSF) present. What expertise do qualified independent shoe fitters offer?

Qualified shoe fitters – They have undertaken extensive training for a qualification in shoe fitting and experience in the development of children's feet right through to senior shoe fitting for problem feet. They don't just use a gauge to measure, they actually 'fit' and give advice.

Measuring gauges - A trained shoe fitter will use a specially designed measuring gauge to check the length, width and depth of your child's feet. However measurement is only a guide – the most important part is checking the shoes when they're on the child's foot. A qualified shoe fitter takes this considerably further, but some training and the use of a gauge is better than nothing at all!

What is happening to these independent footwear retailers and shoe fitting service?

- Few shops selling footwear have a qualified or sufficiently trained Fitter in attendance.
- Independent children's footwear retailers that provide levels of service are closing due to online sales and low-cost rubbish fashion footwear.
- Misguided retailers think they can learn fitting on the job.
- The majority of shops selling shoes are now supermarkets and fashion chains where fitting is not an option.

We need to protect this valuable fitting service to prevent foot deformity.

JOHN SAUNDERS

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C.E.O. – The British Footwear Association

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Speaking as a representative of the U.K. Footwear industry but also as a parent and grand-parent, I urge the government to invest in prevention rather than cure when it comes to foot health.

It must always be better to educate parents to care for the whole health of the children including the need for caring for their children’s feet from birth rather than spending time and considerable money rectifying issues once they have developed in later life. As with every human condition it is better to ensure we avoid the causes of health issues and prevent their occurrence, rather than having to suffer the pain and anxiety of curing a problem once it has developed. A holistic approach to child health should include diet, exercise and include information on the importance of foot health. Its effect on posture and overall well being should not be underestimated.

The growth of fashion over fitting (children are being allowed to chose footwear by style at younger and younger ages) in the minds of the consumer, and the availability and ready purchase of cheaper self fitting, uniform-type and sports footwear from supermarkets and chain stores, have had a major effect on the viability of the quality children's footwear specialist retailers who are less and less able to compete on price. As a result the number of shops specialising in fitting children's shoes has reduced by approximately 50% in the last 10 years which has coincided with a growth in the number of children with foot issues.

The link between ill fitting, unsupportive children’s footwear on foot and related posture issues is well documented – but nothing has been put in place to improve the situation; in fact we have learned that there are far more young people requiring medical intervention which could have been prevented. More and more children appear to be suffering from pronation, plantar fasciitis and other preventable foot problems which will have a direct effect on the health of the population in the future.

Investment in the early stage of child development would save the UK many thousands of pounds from the public purse in rectifying problems.

Early intervention and education with new parents regarding foot care and health should be a part of official guidance from the government, and the Society of Shoe Fitters organisation and network are well placed to help bring about this much needed change.

Although the British Footwear Association represent the supply side of the British footwear industry we receive and pass on several consumer enquiries weekly to the SSF from consumers seeking such advice and guidance, and we are pleased to support the SSF when we can.

ROSEMARY GRAY (Footwear Professional)
M.S.S.F. – **Vice President of the Society of Shoe Fitters**
(Email: ianandrosemary@yahoo.co.uk)



I have been in the footwear industry more years than I care to remember. I have been privileged to always work for a business that puts shoe fitting as its highest priority. Because of that I feel that the family business I work for (North Shoes of Peterborough, Bourne and Cambridge) has prospered and is now one of the very few that has grown to become more than one shop. To have several shops selling to both adults and children is very rare for an independent; sadly too many cannot compete with online sales, supermarkets and fashion stores.

Many years ago I took a short career break. The SSF Secretary Laura rang me saying that members of the public were ringing asking where I had gone and would I see their children and visit their families independently. My customers were desperate to find a professional fitting service and they knew I would not sell them shoes if they did not fit correctly. Many were even prepared to come to my home. Laura asked me to become an SSF Tutor, which I did and I returned to work with a renewed enthusiasm. This enthusiasm has rubbed off and now the owner of North Shoes – James North has qualified as an SSF member and invested in educating numerous members of staff with the SSF. Fitting is of paramount importance to us and customers are loyal because of it. Our staff say they feel extremely proud when they complete their coursework and look back to see how much they've learned – then I make them put it into practice!

The Society secretary has worked hard over recent years to network health professionals with footwear professionals through the National Shoe Fitting Week campaign. This is something I believe in wholeheartedly and I know from experience that it works. I network with Consultants at Hinchinbrook, Addenbrooks and with many foot health practitioners in and around Peterborough. Too many customers were coming instore holding orthotics that will not fit into any of their shoes – and when I asked if the Orthotist had tried them in their existing shoes, they have often said, 'no the Orthotist hasn't even looked at their shoes'. This means that customers have two choices, have shoes made bespoke which can cost upwards of £1,500, or through the hospital (*which are often so remedial looking they wont wear them*), or they simply ignore their expensive orthotic. My aim is to encourage Orthotist's to come instore each season preferably with their patient and work together to find a shoe that will take an appropriate orthotic. All Orthotist's should be encouraged to do this. Patients do not float in the air; they need good shoes and professional fitting.

In truth I have been surprised at the lack of knowledge many of the Consultants have – and they have been surprised at how much knowledge I have as a Qualified Shoe Fitter! Seeing so many feet, many of whom are greatly suffering with Downs Syndrome, EB (skin blistering condition) etc. I know what to look for and what to recommend. Once you sit and talk to a Consultant knowledgeably they begin to understand the importance of footwear on their patients well being and health. The annoying thing is the public will listen to a medical person, but advice given by a qualified shoe fitter can be seen as simply sales patter because they do not realise the massive difference between a Qualified Shoe Fitter and ordinary or trained retail staff.

It is time The Society of Shoe Fitters was acknowledged in a tangible way by government. Our Secretary has invited MP's to our Politically Correct Footwear event at great expense (which we really cannot afford), because the footwear industry is in such a malaise and no-one else has the courage and overall support to speak up. Whether health professional or footwear professional we all know what should happen; we all know what could happen, but it needs the government to get a grip in the right departments and doing something to help.

Please don't take too long thinking about it....we need action now before it is too late!

ELLIE DICKINS (Footwear Professional)
SHOP PROPRIETOR AND PAST SSF PRESIDENT
(Email: ellbell.dickins@gmail.com)



WHAT'S YOUR SHOE SIZE?

My name is Ellie Dickins and I opened a shoe shop 17 years ago as I couldn't get shoes to fit. Having size 9, narrow, shallow feet at the age of 11, it was nigh on impossible to find girls shoes to fit. Ending up a size 10 by the age of 14 and working for a global company in sales management, I decided to change career and source shoes for people with large sized feet. I now supply as many "average" sizes as I do with the extremes; ladies shoes UK sizes 1 – 12.

With the nation becoming taller therefore feet becoming larger and wider, I have seen a huge change in the need for appropriate footwear. Sadly the children's footwear companies have still not reacted to the fact that many young girls are tall and have feet over a size 8, therefore making school shoe buying a nightmare for parents. Cheap imports, online selling and recession have seen a massive decline in independent retailers. Also, the numerous 'high street retailers' offering poorly manufactured cheap shoes has skewed the mind-set of the general public. Consumers want cheap assuming all shoes are basically made the same way, of the same materials and are ignorant of the issues around buying cheap footwear.

I have seen a considerable increase over the past 9 years in foot problems, consumers coming to me from recommendations from professionals asking to be fitted. The number of orthotics (foot supports) being worn by the public to correct foot issues is growing rapidly and would not have been necessarily if they had been correctly shod much earlier. The ignorance around wearing unsupportive, cheap footwear is vast, yet I discuss with my customers, as well as presenting to organisations and clubs, issues surrounding feet and what can be done to help in their situation as well as fitting well-made, good quality shoes that are comfortable, fit well, support the foot and have longevity.

A well-made shoe has at least 60 different components used in its construction, some have up to 200. The components give a shoe its structure and will keep the foot in the shape it is designed to be. **The foot supports the whole of the bodies' musculo-skeletal system, and if the foot goes out of alignment, so will the rest of the body.** This results in increased wear and tear on ankle, knee and hip joints as well as the back shoulders and neck. Keep the foot in the correct shape and it will keep the rest of the body in shape!

The burden on the NHS in increased numbers of orthotics, joint replacements and foot health problems arising from disease such as diabetes and cancer must be immense.

It is time to educate the general public in the need to ensure they are wearing correctly fitted, supportive shoes that will structurally keep their feet and their musculo-skeletal system in good shape.

Next time you're on public transport, or even looking around the room, you'll see feet in shoes that are too big, too wide, slipping off at the heel, toe joints squashed in etc. Incorrectly fitted shoes can do irreversible damage to feet in 3 days. **Who will pay for the treatment needed that could have so easily been prevented with basic education?**

KAREN FRIETT (Health Professional)
MBA, Bsc(Hons) RGN, ENB higher award, PGCE
Chief Executive Lymphoedema Support Network
(Email: karen.friett@lymphoedema.freeserve.co.uk)



'Lymphoedema affects over 200,000 men, women and children in the UK. It causes unrelenting swelling in limbs or body parts and gives rise to significant skin changes and serious infections that often lead to hospitalisation.

For those who live with swelling of the legs and feet finding shoes that are fitted properly is a vital part of their self- management programme.

Ill-fitting shoes lead to foot injury and ultimately increase the risk of infections developing.

Those who live with such life altering and disfiguring disease symptoms struggle to find foot wear that is age appropriate, well made and suitable to their needs, and a lack of expert advice from suitably qualified shoe fitters often forces them to buy shoes several sizes too big in order to get the correct width fit. We regularly receive comments from our members saying they feel like 'clowns' as their shoes flap around on their swollen and painful feet.



Perhaps most worrying are those children born with the condition who struggle to find experienced and trained experts to fit shoes to their swollen and misshapen feet and often end up with more problems, sometimes permanent, caused by wearing ill-fitting shoes.

It is understandable that many people choose to buy cheap off the shelf shoes in these challenging financial times but the resultant loss of suitably trained and qualified professionals able to give expert advice is a devastating loss for those in the Lymphoedema community. Worse the lack of legislation around shoe fitting means that those parents looking to do the best for their disabled child have no way of knowing if those claiming to be able to offer fitting advice have had the appropriate levels of training.

The Lymphoedema Support Network is very pleased to offer our support to the Society of Shoe Fitters as they seek to ensure the vital services offered by their members are protected into the future.'



CHERYL TAYLOR
Editor - Footwear Today Magazine and local
councillor
(Email: cheryltayloreditor@googlemail.com)



As Editor of the UK's largest and longest established footwear trade journal, I support the work of the Society of Shoe Fitters.

The footwear industry is a colourful patchwork and I am in a unique and privileged position to work with the individual sections AND see the footwear industry as a whole quilt. For the past 25 years there has been very little comfort in this sector, the 'quality king-sized eider feather' quilt has been replaced by the 'single +3 tog synthetic' variety, therefore the footwear industry has had a chilly awakening and nightmare struggle to keep doors open and people employed. The S.S.F. is often overlooked and taken for granted on the bottom bunk, so it is astonishing they continue to educate a diminishing industry and help the public – all on a shoestring! ***This is a wake up call to MP's...there is no time to dream, we need to keep their organisation and members open to the public.***

If everyone working in shoe shops trained to become professional Shoe Fitters it could save the NHS thousands (probably millions) of pounds over the coming years. Professional training should be compulsory when selling footwear. Government needs to realise the importance of people's feet in relation to their entire physiology and well-being. I have watched footwear go from a necessity that is purchased with knowledge and care, to a fashion accessory that is stacked high, loses its shape, in no time and ends up in landfill. Children's shoes were always the exception to this, but not any more. Parents are not educated about the dangers of ill fitting shoes, therefore they happily buy cheap shoes from supermarkets and online and fit them themselves. If they knew the dangers it would no doubt save their children and the NHS a lot of pain!

The public needs to be aware of the importance of shoe fitting and with so many independent shoe shops closing their doors; professional shoe fitting is not as available as it used to be. Bearing in mind only a third of the population can readily find shoes to comfortably fit, it is vital to keep as many doors open as we can. Even the big multi-nationals will still benefit from promoting the message. If the independent shoe shops disappear so will many suppliers - damaging the health of the nation AND its economy!

The S.S.F. has had a loyal voluntary Council for 56 years which speaks volumes about the caring and knowledge this organisation provides. As a local councillor I am more than aware how difficult it is to retain and keep a co-operative group of people happy. Secretary Laura West has worked hard to network health professionals with the footwear industry and succeeded in creating a public health campaign that needs more official and tangible support – National Shoe Fitting Week. The College of Podiatry also endorses annual National Shoe Fitting Week, an event aimed at raising awareness about the importance of shoe fitting and its contribution to the well-being of the nation's health. The SSF also works closely with other health professional organisations, **but the Government needs to recognise and help the hugely valuable public service offered by the Society of Shoe Fitters**, which is entirely free of charge to the consumer.

Having suffered from foot problems myself for many years including, bunions, sciatica and migraine (largely caused by wearing ill-fitting footwear in my youth), I can vouch for the importance of shoe fitting and expect that many other 'baby boomers' from the Sixties generation who now make up the bulk of our population, can do likewise! Think about it, that's a massive lobby!

I'm delighted Footwear Today Magazine has pledged its support for National Shoe Fitting Week w/c March 19th 2016; I just hope that MP's will lobby the Government to support the work of the Society of Shoe Fitters. Remember, as far as the skill of shoe fitting goes it's a case of 'support it or lose it' - the choice is yours!

GWENDA CARTER

FCPodMed. MChS. MSSF

**Author – Therapeutic Footwear,
Orthopaedic Footwear Consultant retired, SSF Tutor**

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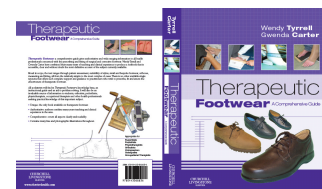


In the 1990's it became apparent that the 'orthotics service' within the NHS had become outdated, patients were demanding a more modern and user friendly service and budgets were very tight. On closer examination through audits and major reports into these services the whole system needed overhauling as money was wasted on unsuitable shoes.

In 1994 I had the task of updating the footwear service for the NHS in Tower Hamlets which proved to be a huge challenge because there appeared to be virtually no formal training available for a health care professional to learn all the necessary skills. Having searched the length and breadth of Great Britain I discovered the Society of Shoe Fitters and their course to train shoe fitting for mainstream shoes to a high standard. This was great but did not equip me to take on the complex challenges of prescription footwear for diseased or damaged feet that no longer fit into retail shoes. I had to learn this specialist knowledge by any means, such as observing Orthotist's clinics, visiting bespoke manufacturers and spending many hours practicing assessments, casting and measuring and then all the specialist terminology. I then set up The Footwear Centre; a centre of excellence in the Mile End Hospital and over the next 15 years developed a team of specialist Podiatrists who were capable of prescribing the most complex footwear demands. In 2000 I launched a specialist Orthopaedic footwear training course to establish a nationwide standard for prescribed footwear and orthotics to go forward into 21st century. This was only backed by the NHS for 6 years. My experience of trying to achieve all of this within the employment of the NHS proved in hindsight to be extremely hard because at every turn there were obstacles with funding, and lack of vision for the future needs of these patients.

In 2008 I was able to work with a colleague to publish a book entitled "Therapeutic Footwear; a comprehensive guide. This is the first publication on prescribing footwear in Great Britain since 1952 and has been received by many different health professionals with enthusiasm as nothing like it has been available before and with the lack of training courses for prescribed/advanced footwear available this book has become a lifeline for many people.

The SSF has not yet been able to finance the Orthopaedic Footwear Course because of the expense of accreditation via a university, so unfortunately a whole area of professional shoe fitting is lacking in training.



Opportunities for cheap fast travel in the 21st Century have allowed many people to do extreme sports that will inevitably cause a small percentage to receive injuries that leave permanent damage that need specialist footwear. Road traffic accidents will always happen and the injured, especially the motorcyclist, frequently have major leg and foot injuries [*motorcycle accident findings*]. Despite all the advances in treatments, surgery and H&S research, people will still fall off balconies, ladders, under cars and injure themselves, or contract diseases that do nerve, circulation, joint or soft tissue damage and a percentage will end up needing prescription footwear. Now is the time for Government to seriously consider supporting this important organization - The Society of Shoe Fitters with funding and a Minister to enable more training and education on the risks of poor shoe fitting and the long term health damage that could be prevented. **It will save the NHS more than just money; it will drastically reduce referrals for many other associated problems arising from painful feet!**

To Whom It May Concern:

As a 'not-for-profit' organisation, The Society of Shoe Fitters has for many years offered invaluable support and advice to the independent retailers our magazine serves. These traders need all the help they can get as they struggle to compete against online sales and supermarkets. They need support and training so that they can offer a superior, personal service in order to survive. It is The Society that these retailers, and the public, look to as a point of information, for advice on training, footwear and foot health.

For initiatives like the National Shoe Fitting Week to be lost would be a great loss to the industry and would surely impact on foot health and cost the NHS dearly in the long term.

The Society of Shoe Fitters has our wholehearted support.

Yours Sincerely

Beverley Green

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Both the Independent Footwear Retailers Association and the Children's Foot Health Register wholeheartedly support the excellent initiative of the Society of Shoe Fitters in their excellent initiative in encouraging and promoting the concept of measuring and fitting footwear from an early age thus promoting happy, comfortable and healthy feet for life.

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