

1980S

PAST
PRESIDENT
PROFILE

Donald W. Hugar, DPM, FACFAS

The old adage, “If you do what you love, you will never work a day in your life,” might best apply to the 59-year career of past ACFAS president, Donald W. Hugar, DPM, FACFAS. Since 1959, his practice, Hugar Foot & Ankle Specialists in Elmwood Park, Illinois, has served patients in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs and remains a familiar landmark for those living near the intersection of Harlem and North Avenues.

However, this all might not have happened were it not for a foot problem Dr. Hugar experienced when he was a pre-med student. “I always knew I wanted to be a doctor and to help people, but I hadn’t yet decided what specialty to pursue,” says Dr. Hugar. “When I went to a local podiatrist for treatment for my own foot problem, I learned he was a clinician at the podiatric medical school. He invited me to visit the school with him to learn more about the profession, and the rest is history.”

As a student at the Dr. William M. Scholl College of Podiatric Medicine, Dr. Hugar was elected president of the Alpha Gamma Kappa fraternity. This position allowed him to schedule and assist in surgeries, which in turn piqued his interest in foot surgery and led him to join the College in 1964. An active volunteer, he became ACFAS president in 1980 and served a two-year term due to several factors.

During that time, the Annual Scientific Conference expanded its sessions and exhibition and changed its meeting date from midsummer to midwinter. *The Journal of Foot & Ankle Surgery* received an upgrade to include more surgical articles and advertisements, and the College was also in the process of securing professional liability insurance for its members.

Dr. Hugar considers himself fortunate to have seen so many positive changes take place in

the profession in the 35+ years since his term as ACFAS president ended. “Not only do foot and ankle surgeons today have greater opportunity to pursue surgical residency, they can more freely practice in hospitals and receive more recognition and referrals from MDs,” he notes. He also points to the increased availability of rearfoot and ankle surgical training, as well as ACFAS workshops, and to the inclusion of podiatrists in more insurance and Medicare plans. “Technology has definitely changed how we practice as well,” he adds. “Computers, iPhones, e-prescriptions and other applications have revolutionized the profession.”

Dr. Hugar gets to experience many of these changes firsthand today at his practice, which he shares with his son Ronald W. Hugar, DPM, FACFAS. He also continues to attend at area hospitals, including Gottlieb Memorial,

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Rush Oak Park, Edward Hines, Jr. VA and Loretto, and chairs Loretto’s podiatry section. He still teaches residents, is a member of national and state podiatry organizations and has attended every ACFAS Annual Scientific Conference since 1964.

Supporting the profession has always been a top priority for Dr. Hugar, especially as the role of the foot and ankle surgeon continues to grow. “Financial support of the APMA and Illinois Podiatric Medical Association Political Action Committees is absolutely necessary if we’re to pass legislation to level the playing field for the profession,” he says. “And as a former Board of Trustee member of the Scholl College of Podiatric Medicine, I feel it’s important to financially support the various school and alumni activities and to provide endowments.”

He believes the podiatric medical schools are on the right track in promoting general podi-

atric care as well as orthopaedic and surgical advances within the profession. “We must not abandon general foot and ankle care,” Dr. Hugar stresses, “because we could miss much of the pathology, leading the patient to seek care elsewhere.” He continues, “Podiatrists who specialize in foot and ankle surgery should, in effect, be the very best at what they do. However, foot and ankle surgeons should know and be able to use all conservative and palliative treatment prior to any surgical procedure performed.”

According to Dr. Hugar, maintaining a connection to general podiatry is vital to the profession’s future. As more residents join medical and orthopaedic group practices, he worries that foot and ankle surgeons will lose patients and referrals to other specialists and providers of foot care. “With anticipated population growth and an increased number of medical problems, particularly diabetic

pathology, we need to be the leaders in foot and ankle care and to provide patients with the highest-quality treatment,” he asserts.

As he reflects on his career and ACFAS membership, Dr. Hugar knows one thing for certain—he would never change the path he chose. “I have enjoyed many years of successful practice while spending time with my wife, children and grandchildren, with one grandson considering a career in medicine and possibly podiatry,” he says. “I also had the chance to train under past ACFAS presidents, Dr. John Collett and Dr. Earl Kaplan, two pioneers in the profession.”

“But what makes me most grateful that I chose a career in podiatric medicine,” he closes, “is when patients tell me, ‘Thanks, doc! My feet have never felt better!’”

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