

## Student Group Aims to Inspire Future Podiatry Students

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Mentoring has become a hot topic in graduate departments these days, and women students in particular are urged to find mentors who can help them navigate their careers and guide them in successfully combining full-time careers with satisfying personal and family lives. That is why at the California School of Podiatric Medicine (CSPM), a school within Samuel Merritt University (SMU), students in the Doctor of Podiatric Medicine (DPM) program continue to support student groups such as the American Association for Women Podiatrists (AAWP) chapter. According to the national AAWP organization, "the goal is to provide leadership to members in the advancement of educational, political, financial, social, and emotional well-being."

"The women in leadership roles and who also have family responsibilities are the podiatrists many female students want to emulate," says third-year DPM student Melinda Bowlby. "The AAWP chapter

allows me to connect with podiatry students at CSPM and nationwide."

Don't let the name fool you. The AAWP chapter is not for women only; it is open to anyone in the podiatry program who supports women in podiatry. "Every year there are male members who attend the events and are active members of the club," explains third-year student Jessica Lickiss. "The purpose of the club is to bring awareness to the different experiences women face in becoming podiatrists, and all members are here to learn and support each other."

"The AAWP chapter is not about being feminist; it's just great to have an additional source for mentors who can relate better," adds Bowlby.

One of the women mentors who has been leading the way at CSPM is Cheri Choate, DPM, and Assistant Professor in the Department of Applied Biomechanics in the Doctor of Podiatric Medicine program at CSPM.

"Only in recent years, have role models become more plentiful for women podiatrists. Although all

members are vital in family life, as women, we have a unique role in the planning of the early years of family life," says Dr. Choate. "As physicians, we are all eager to strike a balance between professional and personal areas of our lives. The more we can share our experiences and our strategies, the better all of us will be to handle the challenges we will face."

"I admire Dr. Choate's confidence, knowledge, experience, and professionalism," states Bowlby. "As a female podiatrist she is incredibly compassionate and relatable."

"Doctor Amy Splitter is another strong female podiatrist who has been an inspiration for me while at CSPM," said Lickiss. "She has been able to set a great example for female students wanting a family life and a work life, and she excels at this."

Splitter, DPM, and 2001 alum, is an attending at Alameda County Medical Center - Highland Hospital. She supervises students as well as teaches surgery courses at CSPM. "She still has time to be a mother and a wife, and I think that

is inspirational," adds Lickiss.

Each year the CSPM AAWP chapter holds an annual dinner in the fall with guest speakers that come to speak to current DPM students and alumni. The AAWP chapter also sponsors cultural and social events such as Women Podiatrist: Balancing Family, Career, and Practice. This spring the group will facilitate a panel discussion about Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.

"I chose podiatry because I felt it has a great impact on the patient's quality of life and it would allow

me to care for others in a hands-on and medically diverse way. In my short time interacting with patients, I have found that as a woman, patients are really looking for emotional support too," says Bowlby.

"Some of the biggest benefits of having a surge in the female podiatrist population are all the female group practices that have been established," adds Lickiss. "These practices allow women to work together and have time off after they have children in a more understanding environment."

*Samuel Merritt University, located in Oakland, California, has been educating health science practitioners who are committed to making a positive difference in diverse communities since 1909. Nearly 1,400 students are enrolled at SMU, with campuses in Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco and San Mateo. The University offers an undergraduate degree in nursing; master's degrees in nursing, occupational therapy, and physician assistant; and doctoral degrees in nursing, physical therapy and podiatric medicine. For more information visit [www.samuelmerritt.edu](http://www.samuelmerritt.edu).*

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