

Getting to Know: Dr. Katerina Grigoropoulos

Ever wonder what a podiatry resident does during their 3 years of residency? Sure we all hear about the early morning rounds or crazy on-call hours. But have you ever heard of a podiatry resident starting a business, launching a podcast, and establishing a non-profit organization all on top of her daily resident requirements? No, this is not made up. This is the life of Dr. Katerina Grigoropoulos, a second year resident at the Loyola University Medical Center, located in Chicago, Illinois.



Born and raised in Chicago, Dr. Grigoropoulos attended Loyola University and majored in biology. After taking a year off, Dr. Grigoropoulos decided to enter podiatric medical school at the Dr. William M. Scholl College of Podiatric Medicine. Since graduating in 2017, Dr. Grigoropoulos has been very busy between life as a resident as well as promoting the profession of podiatry. Dr. Grigoropoulos has taken it upon herself to help the profession of podiatry to become more well known.

Growing up, similar to many pre-medical students, Dr. Grigoropoulos was unaware of the profession of podiatry. Even through early research of the profession there were many misnomers and poorly made YouTube videos that incorrectly portrayed the scope of practice. Dr. Grigoropoulos has made it one of her goals (one of many) to correct the common misconceptions about the profession of podiatry as well as exploit all of the remarkable features of the profession that are unknown.

Q: “Alright, let’s start with the most common question, why did you chose podiatry?”

A: "In high school and college, I knew I wanted to go into the medical field, I knew I wanted to do something surgically, more procedure based. In high school I had an interest for dentistry. Then the more I thought about it I thought, ‘well dentistry is cool but it’s hard to really talk and connect with people since you’re working in their mouths.’ I wanted a surgical profession that allowed me to verbally connect with my patients.

Through college I started volunteering in an emergency department. Emergency medicine was fascinating to me but it lacked the surgical aspect I wanted to fulfill. In the fall of my gap year, I came across my friends’ mother who told me how my friend was applying for podiatry school. I was confused at that moment because I had never heard of someone ‘applying to podiatry school’. I wanted to thoroughly learn about my options so I did some hardcore research about the profession.

At first, I was like DPM... what does that even mean? Is this a credible degree? What I found out about the profession really opened my eyes. As a podiatrist, you are a physician and a specialized surgeon. I was eager to witness the practice of podiatry so I decided to shadow a podiatrist in my community. Within the first hour of shadowing, every patient that we evaluated was being treated for a different pathology. Cases ranged from dermatological issues, post-ops, traumas, or wound care. Everything was so diverse yet so focused on the foot and ankle; it really sparked my attention. It was a breath of fresh air. I couldn’t find anything wrong with podiatry.”

Q: “What characteristic do you most value in a person?”

A: “Honesty, loyalty, good sense of humor and strong work ethic are important, but the greatest characteristic a person can intrinsically possess is the ability to genuinely make others feel special. I feel like you could have all the talent in the world, you could have all the status in the world, but unless you have that human connection and decency to naturally make other people feel welcomed and comfortable within themselves, then what good are the other characteristics? You can learn a new skill or you could improve your work ethic but unless you’re a genuinely nice person with good intentions, all the other characteristics become lackluster.”

Q: “What would you have done differently if you knew then what you know now?”

A: “Looking back, if I knew that everything would turn out the way it has, I would be a lot less stressed. I felt like I was going crazy during second year of podiatric medical school. I wasn’t engaging in any of my hobbies, I wasn’t going out as much as I wanted to. Every day, day in and day out, I was hardcore studying, striving and competing to get good grades and into a good residency program; it became obsessive. Looking back, yes, I obtained my goal to graduate with honors but I sacrificed a great deal to accomplish this goal. I was getting sick thinking about school and grades. I definitely missed out on life those first two years and I didn’t take time to cherish moments with loved ones.

My advice is to make time for yourself and the people you love. Engage in your passions and engage in your hobbies because at the end of the day, work is work. There are so many aspects of life that get taken for granted in school. Work your hardest yes. Do whatever you can in your power to learn and do well in school; you should never lose that passion but don’t get sick over it. Even if it’s 20 minutes per day, take that time for you! We’re only human, we all need time and space to breathe a little.”

Q: “With the application rate down what is your advice to continue to grow it?”

A: “What I think needs to change is the whole undergrad pre-health system. I don’t know why they have excluded us [podiatrists] within pre-health lectures and presentations. I was a part of my undergraduate pre-health committee and we only had MD, DO and DDS guest lectures. Not once did we have a DPM come and discuss the profession. I feel like college is about experimenting and really honing in on your skills, hobbies and interests. If you are not given all of the options, how are you expected to pick wisely? How are we as podiatry students, residents, and physicians expecting other people to know what we do if it is not taught to them? So, I think the fault in the system is that premed students don’t know about our profession.

If every podiatrist went back to their alma mater to engage with the premed students and lecture about podiatry, what we do, what we stand for and why our profession is so critical in the health care system, I am confident that would make a difference. There’s a student recruitment crisis, but it’s in our hands to better spread the word about our profession. The earlier we teach kids in elementary schools/ high schools about podiatry, the more fluent ‘podiatry’ will become in their concept of medical culture. That’s another reason why I think Sole Fit is making a huge impact. We’re not only providing shoes for children in need, we’re providing earlier exposure to the field of podiatry”.

Q: “What’s the best advice you’ve ever received?”

A: “So my Grandma is from Greece and she has a ‘either you like me or you don’t’ type of

personality. She is the type that will do good to everyone with no expectations in return. Growing up she always pushed inner confidence and self-acceptance. Her best advice to me was 'You will progress further in life if you go forth as yourself. Be stubborn with who you truly are.' I grew up with that mentality but I also learned that one should be open to criticism; especially if it's something that will make you a better person. But don't lose yourself along the way; you have more to offer as your raw self than pretending to be someone you're not."

Q: "Who are your biggest influences? Who do you admire most?"

A: "Family wise I would say my grandma and my parents. My parents have demonstrated the value of strong work ethic. My Dad came from Greece to Chicago when he was 17. He worked full time and put himself through college to obtain his engineering degree. My Mom also has amazing work ethic; I don't know how she managed to do all that she does. I wouldn't be where I am today if I didn't have my parents. Outside of family, I look up to an entrepreneur named Gary Vaynerchuk. The way he talks about life and perspective has completely changed my outlook on life and has molded my mind to be more positive and confident with my ideas."

Q: "So I have to ask, how on earth do you do it. How are you able to be such a successful person, excel in your residency, conduct your research projects, create your podcasts, expand Sole Fit, send out your MediPins all while trying to manage to take time for yourself to relax and let loose?"

A: "I work my ass off. That's the secret. I work my ass off because I want to work my ass off. It's not work for me. Research and promoting the profession are ideas I genuinely care about. Sole Fit is something that's been my baby since 2013 and within the last 6 years I'm slowly watching it grow into a national organization. I don't do anything half ass and I understand the importance of trusting the process and being patient. Find things that you are passionate about, that's the key! Instead of going home and drinking wine and watching 5 hours of TV like I use to do, now I go home, read up on surgical technique, respond to Sole Fit emails, package and ship Medipin orders and make dinner. I enjoy designing pins during my free time; it's a fun hobby for me! That being said, I can't work on everything all at once or even on the same day; I work on my own block schedule. I carry my planner everywhere and I write everything down to keep me organized. If you follow your passions in life, they don't become work. I want to see my ideas improve, grow and impact others. I will wake up at 5 am for work and then I will go to bed at 1 am sometimes; I make the most out of the 24 hours a day that I get. Yeah there are days I take off! I'm human too! I love to travel and go out with my family and friends. I put a lot on my plate but I am the type of person that keeps a lot on their plate to preserve momentum."

APMSA would like to thank Dr. Grigoropoulos for taking time out of her busy schedule to talk with us. If you would like to learn more about Dr. Grigoropoulos Sole Fit program, please reach out to her via katerinadpm@gmail.com. You can keep up with Dr. Grigoropoulos and all of her endeavors by listening to her podcast, PodTalk, on apple podcasts, also by following her on Instagram, [@katerinaDPM](https://www.instagram.com/katerinaDPM).

Kristen Brett
KSUCPM Class of 2020