

Young Practitioner: Louis J. DeCaro, DPM

For this DPM, education about biomechanics is the key to success.

BY RAY POSA AND MARK TERRY

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series highlighting young practitioners.

Dr. Louis J. DeCaro says that when he was flown down to Barry University in Miami for an interview at the end of his junior year in college, he didn't even know there was such thing as podiatry school. But because of his MCAT results, the Barry University School of Podiatric Medicine (Miami Shores, FL), invited him down and recruited him into their podiatry program. That was in 1999. He graduated from St. Vincent Hospital Residency (Worcester, MA) on December 31, 2001. Dr. DeCaro says, "I knew I always wanted to be a physician, but podiatry never crossed my mind. Following the meeting, Barry (University) offered me a position and the unique opportunity to forego my senior year and become a podiatrist."

Dr. DeCaro, as of November 1, 2011, has consolidated two offices into a brand new, state-of-the-art 4,000-square-foot office. It has ten treatment rooms and two x-ray rooms. His associate is Dr. Daniel Paknia, DPM. Dr. DeCaro is affiliated with three major hospitals in the West Hatfield, Massachusetts area: Baystate Franklin Medical Center, Cooley Dickinson Hospital,

and Holyoke Medical Center.

With a specialty in pediatrics, Dr. DeCaro has an overarching interest—biomechanics. "Almost everything a podiatrist treats is biomechanically-based. Everything short of trauma has its roots in biomechanics, and even trauma often has its roots in biomechanical faults." He notes that he's passionate about biomechanics, partly because he's the type of person who

likes to get to the root of a problem rather than putting a Band-Aid on things.

Nolaro24, LLC

In that regard, in addition to his practice, Dr. DeCaro has another business: Nolaro24, LLC, as well as conducting a Biomechanical Gait Analysis Clinic. In 2005, Dr. DeCaro was introduced to Roberta Nole (co-owner of

Nolaro24, LLC), who was working on a patent for a foot-typing system. Dr. DeCaro says, "It was a Eureka moment! I remember sitting in the back of the class taught by Ms. Nole and Joe Coletta (now education director for Nolaro24, LLC) thinking two things simultaneously. One, people who go to the eye doctor, no matter what eye doctor, basically get the exact same prescription for glasses. But in podiatry, if someone gets orthotics, there is such a dramatic variability in how they are made. Maybe this system could help change that. Secondly, for the first time ever, it was really explained in an easy-to-understand, logical way, how powerful genetics were in foot conditions."

In 2008, Dr. DeCaro and Nole launched Nolaro24, LLC. They currently have two product lines: the QuadraStep System, which is based on a patented 24-foot type

Continued on page 190



Louis J. DeCaro, DPM

system; and in 2010, they launched a pediatric orthotic, littleSTEPS, which are pre-fabricated foot orthoses specifically designed for children. Dr. DeCaro says, "Both products save all ages lots of money, and at the same time provide custom results."

Biomechanical Gait Analysis Clinic

Dr. DeCaro's second venture is the Biomechanical Gait Analysis Clinic. This is part of his and Dr. Daniel Paknia's practice in the office as part of the DeCaro Total Foot Care Center (www.DeCaropodiatry.com). It provides a team approach toward assessing a patient's foot type and movement, resulting in better clinical outcomes. Dr. DeCaro says, "At the clinic, patients are assessed by a variety of specialists at different stations before the orthotics are created. Not only do the patients get better orthotics, but the practitioners are able to determine how the patient's foot condition could

be causing other problems, such as hip, back, or knee pain. Thoroughly educating patients about their foot type and the influence this has on the kinetic chain are key to the success of this program. Just as I had my 'ah-ha' moment in 2005, my patients have a similar experience after I take the time to explain their foot types and resulting conditions. It is really powerful stuff and makes our practice more successful. My patients leave the appointment and promptly tell their families and friends about what they learned and how it may help them." He adds, "Though education is time-consuming, it is the key to our success."

When asked what some of his influences were at school, Dr. DeCaro laughs, because in podiatry school what he was really interested in was theater. "Barry, being an undergraduate school, had a great theater department. I acted in plays there. In podiatry, I was always fascinated with

biomechanics and sports medicine. James Losito, DPM was a great inspiration. He taught sports medicine and pediatrics." Dr. DeCaro uses his theatrical training now to lecture. He lectures approximately 10-15 times per year, worldwide.

Dr. DeCaro remembers thinking during a biomechanics class that the material was hard to understand "and terribly varied in its approach. No one seemed to be on the same page with teaching it, let alone understanding it." This has inspired him to help further the field in the treatment of children, as well as trying to "help re-define and educate how biomechanics is taught and understood by DPMs and patients."

Dr. DeCaro says, "One of my basic problems going forward in the profession is, it's great that we're moving toward all DPMs being surgically trained, but I fear it's drawing

Continued on page 191

our attention away from the bread-and-butter things that make podiatry a great profession—one of them being biomechanics.”

During podiatry school Dr. DeCaro was a delegate to the American Podiatric Medical Students Association (APMSA), resulting in his traveling and advocating for student issues, which he notes helped build confidence and his understanding of the profession at an early age. “I was exposed to people I would have never met, leaders of the profession, and organizations that stood above the rest.” One of those groups was the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management (AAPPMP), which he joined as a student in 1998. “AAPPMP became a big inspiration to me. Meeting those that shared a genuine passion for the profession, were willing to share, and were successful in what they did in both their professional lives and personal lives.”

Dr. DeCaro also points out that not every organization or profession, at least in the U.S., is as amazingly helpful as the AAPPMP. He describes receiving an email from a podiatrist in Australia asking him if podiatrists in the U.S. were as reluctant to help out their peers or sharing information as they were in Australia. “I told him that the AAPPMP is basically built on sharing and helping out other podiatrists.”

When not treating patients, DeCaro, who is 37, likes to spend time with his wife and four-month-old daughter, Eliza. He reads biographies, but his major hobby is photography. During his travels for lecturing, he takes his camera. Available on his website, www.decaropodiatry.com/photography.html, are photographs taken by Dr. DeCaro. He sells them to raise money to buy orthotics for children with foot problems who cannot afford yet truly need them.

Dr. DeCaro focuses on feet and his various business interests—in particular, treatment of biomechanical issues in children. He says, referring to the serendipity of being recruited into a profession he wasn’t even familiar with, “Opportunity knocked—and I answered—and I have never turned back or been disappointed one bit.” **PM**



Ray Posa, MBA, is the President of The Manta Group, a health information technology consulting firm in Farmingdale, New Jersey. His website is www.themantagroup.com.



Mark Terry is a freelance writer specializing in medicine and the co-author of *3 1/2 ESSENTIALS FOR RUNNING YOUR MEDICAL PRACTICE*. He lives in Oxford, Michigan. Visit his website at www.markterrywriter.com.