

Foot pain found to be caused
by a rare tumor in neck

From Doctors to Detectiv

A bit of detective work coupled with specialized training helped St. Mary Medical Center doctors solve one of the most difficult cases of foot and ankle pain, bringing relief to the patient and improving his quality of life.

Podiatrists Michael Nirenberg, DPM, and Michael Carroll, DPM, recently had an article published in a leading national podiatric magazine regarding the strange details of the case—pain in the left foot and ankle that was caused by a tumor in the neck.

“Many serious medical problems often show up in the feet first. We’re often the first doctors to diagnose diabetes, arthritis, neuropathy or other more serious problems,” Carroll says.

A Mystery Ailment

Severe, debilitating pain in his left foot and ankle brought 49-year-old

Walter Podguski to see Nirenberg and Carroll at their Northwest Indiana office. Podguski is the unit manager for Family Express mart and says his foot and ankle were painful and tired from standing for lengthy periods on the job.

“I had pain in my left foot and ankle that I thought was from an old injury two years earlier playing softball. I couldn’t get relief,” Podguski says. “Before finding Dr. Nirenberg, I went to see another doctor—he prescribed a custom-molded foot support that was an uncomfortable hard, plastic insert. Nothing seemed to help until my wife saw an ad for Nirenberg and Carroll in the local newspaper. I made an appointment.”

Though he didn’t know it at the time, Podguski had a much more serious problem than just foot pain. When Podguski came to see

Nirenberg and Carroll, they were prepared for his unusual case. Both physicians have had extensive training beyond the standard for a podiatrist to practice in Indiana.

“You have to take a thorough medical history and look at the whole patient—not just the foot,” Nirenberg says. “Sometimes you will discover unique things that most doctors don’t look for.”

Upon taking Podguski’s medical history, the podiatrists discovered that besides the pain in his left foot and ankle, he had had kidney stones.

“He didn’t have much of a medical history or any health problems except for the kidney stones,” Nirenberg says. “Yet, he was in a lot of pain and his ankle was quite swollen.”

After running a number of tests, including X-rays and a complete blood work-up, it turned out that Podguski had gout in his foot and ankle. In making this diagnosis, Carroll and Nirenberg realized that

By Elise Sims

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the joints in Podguski's foot and ankle that were affected with gout were unusual.

"We see gout in the foot all the time," Nirenberg says, "but not very often in these particular joints. The way the gout presented was unusual."

The doctors discovered that the painful gout in Podguski's foot and ankle was due to primary hyperparathyroidism—a tumor in his neck. Awareness and early diagnosis of primary hyperparathyroidism is important because, in addition to gout, the condition can lead to a host of other complications, such as kidney stones, diminished bone density, gastrointestinal symptoms, mood disturbances, fatigue and sometimes death.

"That appointment may have saved his life," Carroll says.

Podiatrists Michael Carroll, DPM (sitting), and Michael Nirenberg, DPM (standing, right), diagnosed a rare tumor in the neck of patient Walter Podguski (standing, left) after he sought relief from persistent pain in his left foot and ankle. General surgeon Dennis Streeter, D.O. (not pictured), performed the surgery at St. Mary Medical Center to remove the tumor, which ended the pain and may have saved Podguski's life.

Free from Pain

Dennis, Streeter, D.O., a general surgeon on staff at St. Mary Medical Center, removed the tumor from Podguski's neck. About a month later, Podguski was free of his foot and ankle pain.

While the tumor was diagnosed in 2004, the doctors weren't able to publish their work until they had confirmation that Podguski's pain was gone.

Nirenberg and Carroll's rare case of Podguski's tumor appeared in an article in the June 2007 edition of the *Journal of the American Podiatric Medical Association*, a 100-year-old magazine known as the most prominent periodical for podiatric physicians. It is the second time

Nirenberg has been published in the journal and the first for Carroll.

Both podiatrists view the article as an important reminder that unusual symptoms can cause foot and ankle pain. According to Nirenberg, Podguski's case was very rewarding because the tumor could have been life-threatening.

"When a foot doctor gets to save someone's life, that's really cool," Nirenberg says.

The doctor detectives are currently on to their next case—the rare instance of a patient with herpes in the foot. They plan to submit another article on that case to the *Journal of the American Podiatric Medical Association*. ■