

# Forensic Podiatry: A New Tool to Help Capture Criminals

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**W**e've all seen a police officer "dusting for prints" in a crime movie or perhaps in real life. Fingerprints obtained from a crime scene are a valuable form of identification that can lead directly to a suspect: ditto DNA evidence.

There is a new discipline that deals with an entirely different body of evidence that can help cap-

ture a criminal. Forensic Podiatry is "the evaluation of evidence relating to the human foot, for the purpose of connecting an individual to footwear or a footprint," according to a prominent magazine about criminal evidence. The expert needed to conduct such an evaluation is a podiatrist, a medical professional who specializes in the structure of the foot and lower extremity, and in biomechanics, the science that examines the forces acting on and within the foot mechanically, allowing a forensic podiatrist to deduce much about the person whose footprints have been left at a crime scene.

A forensic podiatrist

may be part of a crime scene investigation's forensic team and may be called upon to examine footprints: made either by bare- or sock-clad feet, often visible because they are prints made in blood or made in material like mud or cement; in order to provide a profile of the footprint; or may be required to examine footwear, to help profile the most frequent wearer or owner of the shoe.

Forensic podiatrists can also examine feet included in human remains; from the length and width of the heel bone a forensic podiatrist can determine the sex of the person, for example. Footprints can reveal how a person's weight is distrib-

uted, and reveal structural characteristics such as toe shape, their distance from the heel, stride width, limb length discrepancies, gait abnormalities, etc. that may help pinpoint an individual. An expert has said that no two footprints are alike, but it takes an expert to see the differences. The wear in shoes can help a forensic podiatrist discern foot types and gait patterns. Some of the latter can be unique to individuals.

Podiatrists can deduce a lot about a living patient's medical conditions and history from an examination of the foot. At crime scenes, the feet reveal quite a bit about victim and perpetrator alike!

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