



American Healthcare Professionals and Friends for Medicine in Israel

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Dr. David Alper tried to get his foot officially in the door of Israeli medicine in 1984. It was not a success in the way he'd initially intended.

The then-28-year-old podiatrist was a 1984-85 APF fellow *in reverse*, so to speak. He went *from* the United States *to* Israel for a year, with funding. His plan, shared by two other podiatrists who accompanied him, was to introduce the specialty of foot and ankle medicine to the Holy Land. (Podiatry also includes some medical care of the lower leg.) The three hoped to pave the way for American podiatrists to obtain licenses to practice in Israel and to, one day, establish Israeli podiatric training.

Alper, a Brooklyn native, now 59 and practicing in Belmont MA, looks back on the year fondly, although admits it began inauspiciously. "We were unable to move forward legislatively and legally to get the necessary licenses and within four to six weeks both of the other podiatrists and their families had returned to the United States.

"The doctors simply couldn't support their families. I was single and just out of school, so I looked at what other opportunities might be available for me."

Alper is now is married with three children. These days he practices mainly general non-surgical podiatry, such as treating ingrown toe nails, sprains, strains, infections and managing wound care. And 25 percent of his practice is devoted to pediatrics. His office shares a duplex with his home. Also, a lot of his work is currently focused on diabetes. Diabetes and foot care go hand in hand, he says. Alper is president of the American Diabetes Association in New England.

But as a trained surgeon, he has done about 1,500 surgeries at local large medical centers, correcting hammer toes, broken ankles, bunions and more.

Flexible and "risk-tolerant" might be choice adjectives to describe the University of Rochester analytical chemistry major. Before podiatry school he'd already researched the effects of aerosols on the ozone layer for NASA in California and been a Cleveland-area paramedic. One of his assignments was in a pit crew at a NASCAR track. To help finance podiatry school he authored restaurant reviews for Cleveland Magazine.

Alper decided to take his medical boards for podiatry school simply because his Cleveland roommate and good friend was studying the profession and seemed to be happy. "The usual kid's reasoning, he said."

"Also, I looked the profession over carefully and decided we were a nice match. Nobody dies because of what I do; I don't get a whole lot of calls at 2 a.m.; it is an incredibly varied field and I knew I could make a niche for myself, all the while doing a whole lot of good."

His board scores met the test and he entered Ohio College of Podiatric Medicine in Cleveland in 1979. Alper graduated in 1983, with a 1982 internship at Bethesda Naval Hospital.

In 1983 he went to Truman Medical Center in Kansas City, MO for a two-year surgical residency that he was able to complete in one because an amazing opportunity to go to Israel came his way.

"They were as excited for me at Truman as I was and they facilitated my finishing my residency in a year."

While, after six weeks, Alper was alone in Israel, he was not out of prospects.

He had impressed Hadassah Medical Center's authorities enough so that the Ein Kerem Campus offered a work permit and a residency/fellowship position in orthopedics, with room and board.

For money he had an APF \$200 monthly stipend, half of which went home to his mother.

At the Hadassah campus clinic he saw about 10 to 20 patients a day, treating strains, sprains, infections and diabetes-related problems.

"I showed them what I did and they showed me what they did. I really had to introduce podiatry to Israel."

And he worked at Jerusalem's ALYN Hospital, a world-renown rehabilitation center for physically challenged children, adolescents and young adults. "There I worked with a lot of very early birth defects that required casting and bracing to straighten out legs and foot positions

"That was a very special experience for me."

Alper also forayed into forensic podiatry when he assisted the Israel National Police with two cases.

Hadassah Medical Center also arranged for Alper to be the medic for an Australian tour group of youth traveling the entire country for three weeks and Egypt for a week. "It was an amazing opportunity for me. I got to see everything, places I'd never have been able to go."

Mostly, Alper had a 9-5 medical life. But his venturesome personality led him to a rich and full social life in and around Jerusalem.

"I'm a Scrabble addict and joined the Jerusalem Scrabble Club that met in the basement of the King David Hotel," he said. "It was great, and I really thought I could learn Hebrew that way, but they all wanted to learn English.

"I made lots of friends there, particularly the president of the club, Canadian Sam Orbaum. He was quite well-known and placed in tournaments all over the country."

On Friday evenings Alper went to pray at the Western Wall and was often invited to Shabbat dinners by people he met there.

"Perhaps it was not the promotion of podiatry in Israeli that was planned. But I have to believe that my exposing Hadassah to podiatry opened doors in the years to follow."

NOTE: While podiatrists now practice in Israel, there are still no Israeli degree-granting podiatry schools. To practice in Israel, one must leave the country for training or move to Israel with training from another country. There are three levels of podiatry licensure in Israel, depending on one's training. Podiatry degree, internship and residency from United States programs enable one to seek the highest level of Israeli licensure.

American Physicians Fellowship for Medicine in Israel

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