

# Foot & Ankle Surgical Associates Finds Strength in a Billing Partner

## Birth of a billing partnership

Terrence Hess, DPM, opened Foot & Ankle Surgical Associates in 2002 as the sole provider. Shortly after opening, he added another provider, and from then on the growth never stopped. Today, there are a total of 77 staff members, six offices, and 10 providers—seven of those being podiatrists.

In 2016, the practice sought a cloud-based electronic health record solution to resolve server issues; that's when they acquired NextGen® Office. But as the practice continued to grow and open new locations, they experienced internal billing challenges, such as the inability to keep up with denials and audits.

“We were looking at options and asked ourselves, ‘Is it a good time to outsource our RCM services, or should we try to continue this in-house?’ Looking at the projected growth goal of the company, we determined that it was in our best interests to go with the RCM services for scalability,” said Joelene Gioulis, chief executive officer of Foot & Ankle Surgical Associates.

After signing with NextGen Office® RCM Services, the RCM team met with Foot & Ankle Surgical Associates' billing staff. They worked side-by-side to decide what roles were distributed to whom and methods of operation—a strategy that built a strong relationship between both parties.

## Outsourcing doesn't replace staff

Even though Foot & Ankle Surgical Associates began outsourcing billing responsibilities to NextGen Office RCM Services, they maintained staff and reallocated duties to other functions, such as prior authorizations and patient collections.

“We have two staff members that are dedicated to patient accounts receivable and moved things around to create a seamless flow for the revenue cycle,” Gioulis explained.

The NextGen Office RCM team carefully observed the practice's billing processes. Anytime problems arise, they offer suggestions and provide solutions. The communication between the RCM team and the doctors and staff has reduced errors and denials, thus shortening the time frame from billing to collecting.

## COVID-19 strikes

Foot & Ankle Surgical Associates lost 51 percent of their patient appointments when COVID-19 hit. The key to their success amid this crisis involved formulating a good response plan. They immediately restricted all spending and pushed their accounts payable (AP) out to the maximum, approximately 30 days. They talked to their landlords and did a cost analysis on vendors to determine where they could save money.

## CLIENT PROFILE

### Foot & Ankle Surgical Associates

**Founder:** Terrence Hess, DPM

**Founded:** 2002

**Location:** Six locations across Washington State

**Number of Providers:** 10

### NEXTGEN HEALTHCARE SOLUTIONS

- NextGen® Office
- NextGen® Practice Management
- NextGen® Office RCM Services

## HIGHLIGHTS

**100%** **100%** staff retention during COVID-19 stay-at-home order



**Cleaned out** AR quickly to remain afloat during COVID-19 stay-at-home order



**Substantial reduction** in billing errors and claim denials



**Utilize** NextGen Office e-visits to maintain visit volume

Their strategy to manage cash flow was to collect as much accounts receivable (AR) as possible and hold out AP as long as they could. They worked directly with the NextGen Office RCM team to clean out their AR and bring in enough revenue to sustain themselves during the stay-at-home order.

“On the RCM side of things that’s where I really have to give five gold stars. No matter what I need or what report I want, they answer me timely and help me with everything I need. They’ve been an incredible addition to our team and very helpful and insightful on the coding and billing side of things. Despite the fact that they are a remote team, it always feels like they are right by our side,” said Gioulis.

To keep seeing patients, staff and providers implemented telemedicine where they could through NextGen Office’s e-visit platform; offered curbside treatment, treating patients in their cars; and minimized exposure by allotting blocks of time for only high-risk patients to come to the clinic. They had to cut staff hours, but did not lay off a single employee. Gioulis’ goal from the start was to keep her staff employed; and it took some creative solutions to make that happen.

“We see a lot of diabetics and if they are not following their treatment plans and we’re not able to see them, they could lose a limb. So, we utilize telemedicine to make sure they are following their treatment plans. They can show a toe or a wound and if the doctor feels they need to come in, then we schedule an appointment at the office,” Gioulis explained.

Following up with their diabetic patients is especially important in reducing the need for an ER visit, an amputation, and in some cases, saving a life.

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**Joelene Gioulis**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Foot & Ankle Surgical Associates



## HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

Partner with us at **877-523-2120** or **ngosalesteam@nextgen.com**.