patients over the course of several years, or even decades, Gozola says he has also learned to take much more initial care in fitting around the foot. “The top of your foot is usually something you put your shoe over,” he says. “With these patients, their foot is going up and down and the tendons are exposed. As the foot becomes older it becomes a point for potential problems. Now we spend a lot more time fitting the dorsal aspect of the foot, making sure there is relief for any bony prominence. We are bending the foot over sideways, making things stick out, and trying to have room for all of the things that happen to the top of the foot. You have to be careful that they don’t get pressure where there shouldn’t be any.”

Learning to fit these patients can be tough, Gozola says. “They don’t teach it at school because they can’t. Most [prosthetists] will see maybe one patient in their entire career. . . . There’s no place to learn it. Right now, it’s like the old Eskimo traditions where they had to pass their knowledge on to youngsters.”

Both Miller and Gozola say interested prosthetists should always contact others if they have questions. “If I had my first rotationplasty patient, I would reach out to other prosthetists around the country that have experience and gain as much information as possible,” Miller says. “I’m happy to send over my PowerPoint presentations, do Face-Time, or whatever I can do to help.” If a practitioner is still unsure, he or she should probably refer that patient to the place where they can get the best care, he says.

Looking Toward the Future

With the rarity of the procedure, there aren’t a lot of adult patients to test the long-term impact of rotationplasty. For the few who have decades of experience, things seem to be going well. Gozola says his oldest patient is 41 years old and she still feels, after all this time, that she made the right decision. “She would never consider having her foot cut off—never,” he says. “None of the kids have opted to have a surgical revision.”

Miller says he too is still doing well decades after his rotationplasty surgery. “I’m 41 years old; I have zero health issues,” he says. “My foot is in perfect condition.”

Decker is also still doing well physically, though she now wears an orthotic on her rotated foot to help the arch, which has been falling as she has aged. Physical therapy and staying active and healthy have also helped her avoid complications, she says. Personally, she has adjusted well and feels that rotationplasty was the best thing she could have done. She mentors children with cancer and gives advice to anyone who asks about the procedure.

“I’m in a relationship with a physical therapist and he thinks my leg is fantastic,” she says.

As time goes on and bodies change as they age, there are still a lot of unknowns, Decker says. “The honest truth is that they don’t know. We are the long-term study. As we grow and adapt, the prosthetist also has to grow and adapt.”

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Reference