

# Group of podiatrists files suit against Triple-S, Blue Cross

## Foot treatment not covered by insurers' plans

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Of the STAR Staff

A group of 28 podiatrists has filed a \$30 million federal antitrust lawsuit against Triple-S, Inc. and Blue Cross of Puerto Rico, Inc. for refusing to accept foot care treatment under their medical plans.

The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court last Thursday alleges officers of the island's two largest insurers, most of whom are medical doctors, have conspired to exclude podiatrists from gaining access to patients insurance.

"As part of this contract, combination or conspiracy by and with

medical doctors, defendants have fixed higher reimbursement rates for foot care provided by medical doctors than for equivalent foot care by podiatrists," the lawsuit states.

By rejecting podiatry care, the suit alleges podiatrists are prevented from gaining access to 60 percent of the insured health market.

According to the defendants, Triple-S is the largest provider of health care insurance in Puerto Rico with a market share of 36 percent. Blue Cross is the second provider with a share of approximately 25 percent.

The defendants have charged Triple-S and Blue Cross with violations to the federal Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890.

"Although podiatrists are better trained to give specialized foot care, the type of services they provide are generally paid by these insurers only to non-podiatric physicians,

such as general practitioners or even orthopedists," said attorney David Efron who filed the lawsuit on behalf of the podiatrists.

The defendants have formed the Podiatry Association, Inc. It is estimated there are about 40 podiatrists in Puerto Rico.

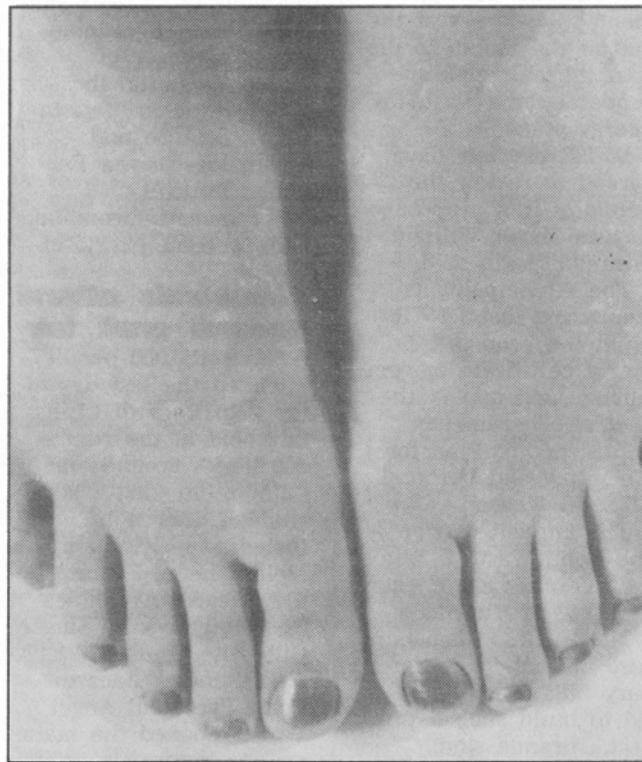
Efron said Puerto Rico is the last jurisdiction in the United States to have this type of discrimination against podiatrists.

Similar lawsuits in the states have allowed podiatrists and patients access to health care coverage, he said.

The lawsuit also states the Puerto Rico Health Reform Law specifically authorizes podiatry services to patients who hold the government health care card.

The law also defines podiatrists as physicians specializing in foot care.

The case was assigned to U.S. District Court Judge Salvador Casellas.



STAR file photo

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