Importance of a Healthy Sole: An Epidemic We Can Eliminate

Over 31% of the world’s population lives on an income of less than $2 per day.¹ This fact indicates the inability of over 2.2 billion people to afford the basic necessities of life including food, housing, and clothing.² Even within the United States, one-in-three children now experience homelessness.³ Within schools in the United States, nurses report that shoes and socks are in the “Top 10 Items Schools Need You to Donate” (#5 and #3, respectively).⁴ Many may never have the opportunity to own even one pair of shoes. A lack of adequate footwear is more than a simple inconvenience or lack of comfort.

More than 1.5 billion people are infected with parasitic diseases transmitted through contaminated soil that could be prevented by wearing proper footwear.⁵ Shoes are needed and we have them. By giving them to the poorest of the poor, we can eliminate an epidemic of unnecessary death.

There are many diseases contracted and spread due to bare feet and the inability of the poor to obtain shoes. The most prevalent among them are soil-transmitted helminth (STH).⁶ These are a group of parasitic infections of the intestine caused by nematode worms. STH is the most prevalent of neglected tropical diseases and is responsible for significant morbidity and, indirectly, mortality in poor developing countries. The combination of periodic drug treatment, health education, and provision of adequate sanitation is a common strategy to control soil-transmitted infections.⁷

A better solution is needed. The spread of STH can also be slowed with shoes. Where drugs can be expensive to research and develop, shoes can be more quickly and easily obtained and delivered.

People are dying without shoes we are able to provide. We can improve, and even save, the lives of millions with new shoes, proper medicine, and hygiene education.

³ American Institutes for Research. “America’s Youngest Outcasts.” 2014
Why Shoes?

The staff and volunteers involved with Samaritan’s Feet understand that shoes are a solution that can be applied now at minimal cost. Drugs are very important when it comes to treating diseases, but shoes can be used to prevent the hardship and life-threatening symptoms caused by parasitic infection and soil transmitted helminths. By washing feet and providing shoes, Samaritan’s Feet is both sharing hope and saving lives.

Up to 10% of barefoot populations suffer from podoconiosis, one of the world’s most neglected tropical diseases.\(^8\) It is a type of endemic non-filarial elephantiasis prevalent in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi, Cameroon, Tanzania, and Guinea, particularly in barefoot agricultural workers. It is the result of walking in silica-heavy volcanic soil.

Hookworm is an intestinal parasite that is caused by direct contact with soil contaminated with larvae, or by ingestion of the larvae. An estimated 576-740 million people in the world are infected with hookworm.\(^9\) Hookworm causes anemia, abdominal pain, diarrhea, ascites, and children may experience slow growth and mental development.\(^10\)

Schistosomiasis is a disease caused by parasitic worms. In 2011, at least 243 million people worldwide required treatment for schistosomiasis.\(^11\) Infection occurs when skin comes in contact with contaminated water in which certain types of snails that carry schistosomes are living. The body reacts to the eggs with fever, chills, cough and muscle aches. Repeated infections can damage the liver, intestines, lung and bladder.\(^12\)

Tungiasis is a disease caused by a parasitic flea. It is found in tropical Africa and is highly prevalent in impoverished areas. One study found about 42% of Nigerian children were infected with tungiasis.\(^13\) This disease affects the feet because fleas burrow into the skin of the host on the bare foot or toes. Painful swelling and the development of a fibrous cyst follows and may progress to bacteremia, gangrene, tetanus and death. That same study showed that the regular use of

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footwear was a protective factor.\textsuperscript{14}

**Ebola**

With the recent increase in cases and severity of Ebola, one widely-circulated article claimed that walking barefoot could contribute to the spread of this deadly disease.\textsuperscript{15} Samaritan’s Feet hopes to do all they can do to stop the spread by providing anti-bacterial shoes that will protect feet from contaminated soil.

**A Vicious Cycle**

There are many hazards associated with going barefoot in contaminated sand, soil, and dirty water. In many developing countries where stagnant water is a problem, these diseases are almost a condition of life. Children sometimes swim in parasite-infested waters, and in the absence of suitable drinking water, people may be forced to drink it and use it for cooking purposes. Amongst the poorest of the poor, parasitic infection is a vicious cycle.

Once parasites enter the body, they often perforate the intestines, circulatory system, lungs, liver and other organs, and cause physical trauma. They can lump together in balls, and travel into and erode or block the brain, heart and lungs. On occasion, these lumps have been mistaken for cancerous tumors. Parasites also give off metabolic waste products that poison the body. Left untreated, the infections they cause can result in the loss of limbs, chronic illness and even death.

Parasitic infections often prevent adults from being able to work and children from being able to attend school. The relationships between illness, access to education, and poverty have been well-documented by organizations such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

**The World’s Problem**

There are many different types of parasitic and soil transmitted diseases prevalent in the world. Hookworm, podoconiosis, and schistosomiasis, are just a few of the most common. According to the World Health Organization there are currently 2 billion people infected with these diseases in more than 100 countries. This is truly a worldwide epidemic that demands immediate

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\textsuperscript{15} Zocalo Public Square. “Here is One Thing We Can Do to Control the Spread of Ebola.” 2014.
action and attention.

**Sharing Hope**

The people of Samaritan’s Feet believe that shoes are so much more than status symbols and fashion accessories. A new pair of shoes can be a symbol of hope and the source of life to a person in need. The Samaritan’s Feet Shoes of Hope distributions are designed to both meet physical needs and inspire young people to believe in the value of life and service. These distributions are the outpouring of Samaritan’s Feet dedication to changing hearts and lives forever.

**Washing Feet**

Samaritan’s Feet is more than a charity. Our commitment to a lasting hope that can change the world forever demands that we do more than simply pass out shoes like free candy. We take the time to wash the feet of those who receive our shoes, and work with our distribution partners to ensure that they do the same. It is important to provide basic hygiene and hygienic education in order to provide a legitimate and lasting means of overcoming the deadly parasitic and soil-transmitted epidemics terrorizing the developing countries of our world.

**Hitting the Target**

South America and Sub-Saharan Africa are two of the hardest hit regions of the world by poverty and debilitating diseases that can be prevented by wearing shoes. Samaritan’s Feet has established regional offices in Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil, and Peru, so that we can serve effectively on the front lines in our battle against this epidemic. We have sent trained volunteers and containers of shoes to help tens of thousands of children and impoverished adults in Burundi, Cameroon, the Sudan, and other countries hit hardest by these diseases.

- More than 5,500,000 pairs of shoes have been distributed by Samaritan’s Feet.
- More than 5,500,000 lives have been changed for the better.
- More than 5,500,000 souls have been offered a true message of healing and hope.

- We’ve served in over 70 countries around the world.
Treating Disease

Samaritan’s Feet works diligently to prevent hurt and disease by providing shoes. However, in many cases the children and communities we encounter are already suffering from the effects of existing disease and other foot related health issues. We take the responsibility and opportunity to promote good health as well as sharing hope very seriously. Samaritan’s Feet partners with medical personnel and organizations in order to provide treatment, supplies, and proper medication for those in need.

10 on 10 in 10

The thought of helping almost two billion people in one effort is overwhelming. However, to think about one child, ten students, one hundred prisoners, and one thousand young pregnant women, makes the impossible seem possible. The opportunity of placing shoes on the feet of the needy and defeating this deadly epidemic comes into focus when you consider the power of partnership, the reach of multiplication, the simplicity of lacing up one pair of shoes, and the ability of modern transportation to take us anywhere in the world.

Each day millions face the dangers of laceration, fungus, contaminated soil and insect bites that lead to infection, disease, amputation, and death. It is the goal of Samaritan’s Feet to lead the fight against this epidemic and place 10 million pairs of shoes on 10 million of these hurting and endangered people in the next 10 years.

People are dying without shoes. Epidemics have been alleviated in the past by the hard work and sacrifice of passionate people willing to address the needs of others, offer material and financial resources, provide basic education, and share the encouragement necessary to help others find the hope they need to fight for their lives.

The solution is SHOES. Shoes are needed to prevent, protect and propel. Join Samaritan’s Feet today in the effort to eliminate this epidemic and change the world forever.

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