

A Chiropractor's Responsibilities to Public Health

John Pammer, DC, DACBR

When some chiropractors hear "public health," they think "childhood vaccinations." This immediately turns them off, and they close their minds. However, indulge me for a moment. What about all the other public health (PH) services? These include exercise counseling; advice on correct posture; scoliosis screening; blood pressure checks; smoking cessation assistance; mammography; prostate cancer screening; seat belt usage; and eye exams - to name a few.

I have been in practice for 42 years and have found no better way to build a self-sustaining chiropractic practice than to get involved and give back to your community. Now I know this sounds like a tired, old cliché, but please bear with me and keep an open mind.

My son practices with me, and he and I attended the senior citizens health fair sponsored by our congresswoman, who just happens to have worked in my office as my CA for four years. At this health fair we did not give posture screens or check for subluxations, fixations or misalignments - we checked blood pressure!

Everyone knows that the "seasoned citizens" population is fast-growing, and blood pressure is a great concern for the over-50 age group. My son and I checked the blood pressure of 225 people in the course of five hours. We also had the opportunity to talk face-to-face with everyone, and listen to their other concerns: low back pain/stiffness, knee pain, hip pain, and all forms of cervical complaints.

We also provided informative literature from the ACA, Krames Communications, and Sportelli Publications, just to name a few. At the end of the day, all of the materials were gone. What a great public relations event. It was far less expensive than Yellow Pages advertising! Several of our patients were there and provided unsolicited testimonials, praising the benefits of chiropractic care. In the following weeks, we saw several new patients as a direct result of our presence at this fair. Talk about practice-building!

Many of the senior ladies who came to our table spoke of their concerns about osteoporosis. How can a chiropractor be involved with this major PH problem? This is how we do it. We weigh and measure all of our new patients to formulate a baseline and identify any weight problems. Therefore, if a female patient is losing height, we send her in for a DEXA scan to determine bone loss. We then can advise her on foods and food supplements, along with beneficial exercises to slow down the bone loss. A report is then sent to her OB/GYN and family practitioner with our findings. This completes the circle of coordinated health care, and gains the attention and respect of our medical practitioners. It opens the door for referrals from them for low back pain during pregnancy, tension headaches, and other musculoskeletal conditions that chiropractors are trained to treat and that we do efficiently. Practice building? You bet - at its finest and most ethical.

Another PH problem *du jour* is that of school backpacks. Have you ever seen the number of books and felt the weight of these texts? My grandchildren carry books on their backs like Sherpas toiling under a load of mountain-climbing gear. The ACA has a beautiful camera-ready ad for insertion in

your local school newspaper at a very reasonable cost, which illustrates the danger to the growing spinal segments from improperly fitted backpacks. You can then talk to parent/teacher groups to advise them on this PH problem and how to prevent some adverse effects on their children's spines. It's another practice- building and PH bonanza!

I could go on with other PH programs, but by now you should be getting the "big idea," as B.J. Palmer used to tell my classmates and me at Palmer School of Chiropractic. (Yes, B.J. was one of my teachers.) PH renders a valuable service to American citizens, and PH is now on the lips and on the minds of all Americans since the cowardly attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

This is what the American Public Health Association is all about. Chiropractic is a full-fledged member with our own section, which enables us to communicate and have input with all types of health care providers: dentists; optometrists; podiatrists; emergency medicine; immunologists; psychologists; nurse practitioners; physician assistants; and many other professionals who help shape the fabric of PH. What an excellent opportunity for chiropractors to have input and to contribute to America's health care!

All it takes for you to be involved is to fill out a membership form, pay the \$140 yearly fee and become active.

The APHA's 2002 meeting will be in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Over 12,000 health care professionals attend these meetings, and the exhibit floor is so enormous it takes at least four hours to see it all. From there you can take home a variety of PH pamphlets, which will help you maintain your presence and service to the people of your community while you build your practice.

The website of the APHA is www.apha.org. We look forward to your participation.

*John Pammer,DC,DACBR,
member of the ACA Committee on APHA, and past chairman of the Chiropractic Health Care
section of the APHA,
Catasauqua, Pennsylvania*

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