

G.L. Southall, Where Are You?

John Hanks, DC

When I tackle the drudgery of office paperwork on the weekends, I like to watch TV. If it weren't for satellite TV and my recliner, I might have quit practice long ago. Managed-care paperwork adversely affects my quality of life, so I fight back with some popcorn, the History Channel, and sometimes a "one-star" action movie, in which a lot of cars blow up.

I've been seeing a commercial on several of the channels selling some kind of internal antenna for cell phones. A few personal testimonials are offered, but the one that got my attention was from G.L. Southall, an attractive woman whose caption identified her as a "licensed chiropractor." I thought, "Really - as opposed to what? An unlicensed, fugitive chiropractor? A drive-by DC bad-guy?" I suppose some assistant editor thought that adding the "licensed" moniker would add credibility, much like "licensed" massage therapist or "licensed" acupuncturist. But I doubted that they would have captioned "licensed medical doctor" under an MD's testimonial.

This commercial, and the annoying "licensed" thing began to get to me. "I bet G.L. Southall doesn't even exist," I thought to myself. "I bet that woman is not even a chiropractor." I decided to find out. I was able to get an office address, which led to a possible phone number. She really might exist! I timidly left my name and an idea of what I was up to - and damned if she didn't call me back!

"Dr. Hanks, this is Ginger Southall."

Surprised, I quickly gathered my questions, and began to interview her in a proper and professional manner.

"So...Ginger! What's up with this 'licensed chiropractor' stuff?"

It turns out that she is a '1996 graduate of New York Chiropractic College, and has been working as a writer in the health education/popular magazine world, as well as making her way as a television health care commentator.

"I have had real regrets about that commercial since it was made over a year ago," she said. "I had auditioned for a different role, but when they found out I was a chiropractic physician, they cast me. I didn't know until much later that they had used my real name, and put that 'licensed chiropractor' caption under it."

Dr. Southall went on to tell me stories about the difficulties she faced in the broadcasting business. "I've found a lot of ignorance in the media about chiropractic education. Often, they seem to prefer somebody with a BS in journalism, but who can't spell 'ovarian cyst,' over someone with real basic and clinical science credentials."

This leads me to my point: Why all the ignorance about chiropractic education and the years spent obtaining the doctorate in chiropractic? I don't know.

Ginger Southall,DC, will be successful in her pursuits, I'm sure. But why does our profession continue to have to explain why we are "doctors?" Is it because we humbly roll up our sleeves and

do things similar to massage and physical therapists? On television, or in person, perhaps it looks too much like the same thing - to the uneducated public.

Just tonight, I saw another health-type commercial, this time about feet. Appropriately, a podiatrist was interviewed, with a caption identifying him as a DPM. The caption did not read "licensed podiatrist," it read "foot surgeon." What should our caption read? "Dr. So and So, member of a sadly undifferentiated profession that fights among itself constantly, and thus cannot identify itself clearly to the public"?

Optometrists; dentists; podiatrists; naturopaths; PhD psychologists; and even veterinarians have degrees that say "I'm a type of doctor; call me 'doc.'" Well, call me doc, or call me crazy, but just don't call me licensed. Chiropractors have to get back to the business of methodically educating each generation that we not only adjust the spine, but we also can interpret blood pressure.

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