

## Chiropractic Converges on Capitol

Editorial Staff

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Hundreds of doctors of chiropractic from around the country met in Washington, DC, March 6-9, for the American Chiropractic Association's annual National Chiropractic Legislative Conference (NCLC). The chiropractors were there to lobby for Medicare reform, insurance equality, and passage of patient-protection legislation.

The chiropractors were able to celebrate for the second straight year a major legislative victory. This year it was legislation that was signed by President Bush in January to establish a permanent chiropractic benefit in the Department of Veterans Affairs' (DVA) health care system; last year it was President Clinton signing into law historic legislation mandating that chiropractic care be made available to all active duty personnel in the United States armed forces.

"Chiropractic is making history like never before because of your consistent contributions and your belief in the political process," ACA President Daryl Wills, DC, told the audience of more than 350 DCs and chiropractic students. "Through our victories we are a force to be reckoned with. We have friends in high places. It didn't used to be that way."

According to the ACA, its political action committee raised more than \$400,000 last year for its lobbying efforts.

"For many years we've heard, 'What have you done?' At no other time in our history is this profession doing more," noted ACA Chairman James Edwards, DC.

That congratulatory sentiment was echoed by several U.S. representatives and senators who attended this year's conference.

"I would just compliment you that your approach and the desire to persevere is very powerful," said Rep. Steve Buyer (R-IN), who was instrumental in convincing the House Veterans Affairs committee that chiropractic should be an integral part of the VA health team.

Sen. John Ensign (R-NV), a regular chiropractic patient at the health clinic on Capitol Hill, noted that any group, including doctors of chiropractic, needs to lobby Congress to get its issues noticed. "As legislators, we know very little. There are too many things to learn; that's why lobbying is really educating."

Senator Ensign pointed out that many people, including legislators, may not understand what chiropractic can do. "Most members of Congress really want to do the right thing," he asserted. "If you convince them that something is logical and practical, things can change."

Rep. Jerry Moran (R-KS) said fairness and patient choice are his own guiding principles when tackling health issues in Congress. "These two principles came together so well in this (VA) legislation."

"Chiropractic is needed to meet the health care needs of the country," observed Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA). "Twenty-eight million Americans may be using chiropractic, but all Americans should have

access."

Acting Surgeon General Dr. Kenneth Mortisugu, who spoke to the NCLC's attendees, commended ACA on being one of the first groups to join HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson's Workplace Partnership for Life campaign, a program to increase organ donations in the U.S.

#### House of Delegates Meeting

The NCLC was immediately followed by the annual meeting of the ACA House of Delegates (HOD). The delegates passed the following managed care resolution:

"ACA has long been concerned over the harmful and discriminatory practices of managed care organizations - particularly chiropractic networks and third-party administrators - affecting proper patient care and the practice of chiropractic. ACA vehemently opposes these harmful and discriminatory practices associated with managed care: limiting full scope of practice, inappropriate CPT applications and reimbursement policies, use of discount/affinity programs, restrictive limits of care, and improper utilization review. ACA and its leadership will communicate this position to the profession, as well as obtain detailed data on these abuses, develop and implement a plan to halt them, and give a status report on these efforts at the August 2002 HOD meeting and each subsequent HOD meeting."

The HOD meeting included attorney George McAndrews reporting on the progress of ACA's lawsuits against HHS and Trigon Blue Cross Blue Shield of Virginia. Don Johnson, from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, reported on the Bush administration's plans to increase Medicare benefits and to create a "culture of responsiveness" at the agency.

The awards segment of the HOD meeting included the presentation of a bust of the late Gerald Brassard, DC, a founding member of ACA, to Dr. Brassard's family and ACA members. The bust, which commemorates Dr. Brassard's important work and advocacy on behalf of the chiropractic profession and ACA, will be displayed at its headquarters in Arlington, VA.

*Editor's note:* For a personal perspective on the NCLC Conference, see "[Celebrate Our Victories](#)," by J.C. Smith, MA, DC.

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