

Chiropractic in Pattaya, Thailand

RONALD WATKINS, DC, IN HIS SEVENTH DECADE OF PRACTICE

Rand Baird, DC, MPH, FICA, FICC

On a visit to Thailand in February, I met with chiropractic pioneer Dr. Ronald J. Watkins. The legendary Dr. Watkins is a 1942 Lincoln Chiropractic College graduate in his seventh decade of practicing and teaching. His professional accomplishments are many: He was a dean at the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College in Toronto and Life Chiropractic College in Atlanta; besides his private practices and college affiliations, Dr. Watkins has taught technique, neurology and radiology at Cleveland Chiropractic College, Los Angeles, and has been published extensively.

Renowned as a particularly skilled spinal adjuster, Dr. Ron has done some amazing things. Once, at a technique seminar at CCCLA in 1981, a tearful student asked Dr. Ron if he could try to adjust her dog. Her beloved pet had gone lame in his back legs and had been constipated for several days. The veterinarian had told her there was no hope and advised that the dog be put to sleep. Dr. Watkins told her to carry the dog into the building. As the chairman of the college's public health department at the time, I cringed and looked the other way, as dogs were (of course) not supposed to be there.

He palpated the dog's lower spine and pelvis, and exclaimed, "Right there!" The dog let out one painful yelp. Dr. Ron delivered a quick sharp thrust maneuver, and we all heard a loud, bone-snapping pop. The formerly subluxated dog then jumped and ran happily, barking all around the stage of the auditorium. There was barely a dry eye in the awed audience.

"Take him outside, because that constipation will be over in a few minutes," Dr. Watkins advised.

Dr. Ron left America after his beloved wife passed away, and at age 83 (far too young for him to retire) he relocated to Thailand, in Southeast Asia, where he has been for just over five years. He and his son live in a comfortable house a few minutes' walk from his office in Pattaya. The oceanfront resort city is a two-hour van ride away from the capital city of Bangkok. It's a popular holiday or vacation destination for locals and tourists alike. Ocean breezes temper the hot, humid and balmy climate, and it has modern shopping malls, great restaurants, in contrast to its more primitive Third World features.

There is rather heavy traffic congestion in Pattaya. The local transportation is via open-air minivan taxis and motorcycles with *tuk-tuks*, or passenger sidecars. When Dr. Ron and I walked across the street to go to dinner, there was a loud crash as a local girl driving a motorcycle was rear-ended by a car and knocked to the pavement! At least she had been wearing a helmet! The police and the ambulance showed up quickly, and fortunately for her, emergency medical care is of a high-quality in the larger cities in Thailand.

Dr. Ron still maintains a full-time solo practice. He adjusts the natives and tourists, expatriates and retirees from several nations. His CAs act as translators, too. He has about 100 patient visits weekly in his nicely designed, modern clinic. Of course, it's a cash practice. The currency is the *baht* (42 *bahts* to the U.S. dollar). Dr. Ron doesn't have to put up with the vagaries and perfidy of the insurance industry, since there is no managed care in Thailand.

Clothing, food, housing and domestic services are inexpensive by American standards. Dr. Ron likes to swim in the ocean every morning. After dinner, he and I took a three-mile walk (his mind, hands and legs as quick as ever) before he adjusted my cervicals as I sat at a table. His skills are still as phenomenal as I remembered from the last time he had adjusted me nearly 20 years ago in Los Angeles.

When Dr. Ron first emigrated to Thailand, he worked with another DC in a clinic in Bangkok. The people and the government authorities were unfamiliar with chiropractic. Dr. Ron had to explain that chiropractic was neither a branch of Thai massage nor of medicine. He was also arrested for practicing medicine without a license, and spent some time at the local police station. (See www.chiroweb.com/archives/15/18/24.html for a related story.) Eventually, the legal situation was resolved. Dr. Ron has since practiced without harassment. Ironically, he now adjusts some of the local politicians and policemen. Chiropractic is still not a licensed profession in Thailand, although the Thailand Chiropractic Association and its president, Dr. Oat Buranasomati (an LACC graduate), are working diligently and with the support of the World Federation of Chiropractic toward the goal of establishing a valid licensing law and board.

Dr. Ron has always had a special interest in proprioceptive postural reflexes, and uses them with spinal adjustments to correct subluxations and restore normal neural integrity and function of the nervous system. He has published articles on topics such as the auricular points in the ears and the peri-anal fiber contact points in the pelvis.

Bringing primary care and chiropractic to improve and enrich the health of underserved populations in different cultures, and to developing nations, is an important part of the public health agenda. To improve the health of the world's people, the World Health Organization exhorts us to "Think globally, act locally." In my opinion, the world would be a healthier place if there were more doctors of chiropractic who thought globally and acted locally like Dr. Ronald Watkins.

Dr. Ron enjoys hearing from old friends and colleagues. His mailing address is:

Ronald Watkins,DC
Pattaya Chiropractic Center
571/33 Pattaya, M5 - Naklua Road Soi 23
Chonburi, Pattaya 20150 Thailand

Rand Baird,DC
Torrance, California

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