

## No Tears for Dr.Koop.com

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As various medical web-sites scramble to add "alternative medicine" to their laundry list of pages, it is interesting to see which ones allow politics to dictate their content. Some sites have almost nothing on chiropractic, and when they do, it can be very negative. A typical example is HealthScout.com with only one article on chiropractic and two more that mention us.

Another example is the seemingly ill-fated DrKoop.com, a site not expected to survive through the end of the year. Sites like DrKoop.com have somehow managed to include a great deal of information while logistically excluding any obvious reference to chiropractic:

- I first tried looking under the "Health and Wellness" menu. No chiropractic there.
- Then I looked under "Community." Nope, not there either.
- "Family Health"? Not a thing on any form of nonmedical care.
- One at a time, I began trying some of the site's "more than 80 health topics."

Under "back pain," I found the subheading "Working with Health Care Professionals." I found two paragraphs written by an osteopath. The second paragraph contained information on licensure and education. As for the first paragraph:

"Chiropractors and some physical therapists routinely perform a treatment called spinal manipulation. During this procedure, the chiropractor or therapist uses his or her hands to apply pressure to the back in order to return the vertebrae to their proper position. The manipulation creates a popping sound similar to cracking your knuckles. There is evidence that spinal manipulation can be helpful for acute back pain sufferers during the first month of symptoms. After the first month, according to the latest studies, such treatment may or may not be effective."

Not exactly accurate, complete or balanced information.

Desperate for more information on chiropractic, I finally broke down and used the site's search field. If there were any more chiropractic information hiding on this site, a comprehensive search would find it.

Success! Out of tens of thousands of pages, 26 contained some information about chiropractic. Here are some sample statements:

"In the U.S., chiropractic is an established profession; and while unscientific methods are rife in the profession, its distinguishing, unifying method - spinal manipulation therapy - is, in its standard form, effective against the most common forms of low back pain.

"So far, studies of the following treatments have not been shown to prevent curve progression or

worsening: chiropractic manipulation, electrical stimulation nutritional supplementation.

"Chiropractic manipulation and Butekyo breathing to relax the chest muscles are also considered in the care of asthma, but none have scientific validity at this time."

The rest included some encyclopedia references and some rather poor comments from chiropractic's long-time nemeses Stephen Barrett, MD, William T. Jarvis, PhD, and other members of the "American Council on Science and Health."

Another website (OnHealth.com) is designed in a similar manner, only they present a little more "alternative" exposure on the home page. You still have to use the site search to find anything on chiropractic, but they do have 67 pages.

Unfortunately, all of these pages appear to have been written by members of the National Association of Chiropractic Medicine (NACM). Particularly offensive is the "Before You See a Chiropractor" page (<http://onhealth.com/alternative/resource/althealth/item,45056.asp>) that warns:

- Be evaluated by a medical doctor first.
- Let your medical doctor know if you decide to use a chiropractor.
- Discontinue chiropractic care if you haven't felt significant relief within three weeks of treatment.
- Select a practitioner who subscribes to the philosophy of the National Association for Chiropractic Medicine. Avoid practitioners who are overly critical of mainstream medicine, prescription drugs, surgery, immunization or other public health practices...
- Check your chiropractor's credentials.
- Never rely on chiropractic care for children.

The NACM also enjoys a link on every page having to do with chiropractic.

It would appear that the same politics that caused the AMA to boycott chiropractic three decades ago are still alive and well on various websites. The public continues to hear the same "don't trust a chiropractor" message that has been hampering our profession for years.

We attempted to contact OnHealth by e-mail for an interview to ask them about their policies toward chiropractic. While we did receive a polite, unofficial - and by the way, automated - message that same day, by the time you read this, more than two weeks will have passed without receiving a live response from OnHealth.

Since we have been unable to receive an answer to our request, you might be interested in contacting OnHealth yourself (Tel: 206-583-0100; Fax: 206-652-8665; e-mail: [comments@onhealth.com](mailto:comments@onhealth.com)) and informing them about the reliability of their source of chiropractic information. Maybe a short paragraph such as the one below would convey the proper message:

"Dear Sir:

"The statements regarding chiropractic on your site made by the National Association of Chiropractic Medicine (NACM) do not in any way reflect the opinion of the majority of the chiropractic profession. The NACM, while claiming to speak for the profession, is actually a small group of renegade doctors whose opinions are generally anti-chiropractic. I consider this an insult to the profession. I strongly suggest that you find a different source and/or person to provide more objective chiropractic content."

OnHealth.com and DrKoop.com are the number two most-visited health websites, respectively. And while they generate an enormous amount of traffic, they are only as good as the information they provide.

Thus far, the Internet has presented chiropractic with a fairly level playing field. But that won't last forever. This is why *Dynamic Chiropractic*, ChiroWeb.com and ChiroFind.com are working so feverishly to expand chiropractic's online presence. Here, we can provide reliable information that will allow people to make an informed choice. This is what the internet is all about.

So, as we quietly bid "good-bye" to DrKoop.com, we can only hope that the new number two health site will be more inclined toward providing unbiased information in an open fashion that encourages choice. When one considers the earlier findings of the Eisenberg,<sup>1</sup> et al. study, which showed that U.S. adults made 629 million visits to alternative health practitioners vs. 386 million to primary care physicians, one can only wonder why we continue to be placed at the back of the bus, if not in the trunk.

Maybe someday soon, the top health site will be an "alternative" health site.

### *Reference*

1. Eisenberg DM, et al. Trends in alternative medicine use in the United States, 1990-1997. Results of a follow-up national survey. *JAMA* November 11, 1998;280(18):1569-1575.

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