

Food for Thought 1999

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Last fall, *Dynamic Chiropractic* ran a front-page story about the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) taking Tedd Koren, DC, to task for statements made in brochures he sells. The general tone of the article and Don Petersen's commentary were ominous, implying that chiropractic is once again being singled out to be bullied by large and powerful organizations.^{1,2}

My take is different. Since I began practice in 1986, chiropractic has made great strides in many areas. A good example of how far we have come, both in public perception and pop culture, occurred in the surprise summer hit movie "There's Something About Mary." In one scene the star, Ben Stiller, hurt his back. In the next scene, he was treated by a chiropractor, who was also an old high-school friend. When Ben Stiller asked the doctor if he knew what had happened to Mary (Cameron Diaz), the chiropractor informed him that he had run into Mary at a conference and that she was an orthopedic surgeon.

This type of portrayal in the media and/or pop culture was unheard of a few years ago. Think about it. The public gets a message that a chiropractor and an orthopedic surgeon attended the same conference. I am not a marketing expert, but it certainly would be interesting to have someone calculate how much a positive portrayal of our profession is worth in a movie that grossed well over \$150 million in the U.S. alone.

However, with greater public acceptance also comes greater responsibility, because more and more people no longer consider chiropractors as paraprofessionals or quacks, but instead categorize us as mainstream. When prominent members of our profession make claims and statements, many people will take these seriously. In the case of Dr. Koren, some of the claims in his brochures included claims that chiropractic can increase IQ scores and scholastic performance in students; that chiropractic can effectively increase the resistance in unvaccinated children to diseases such as measles, mumps, German measles, and chicken pox; that the children of chiropractors are healthier than the children of pediatricians; that most newborn babies have spinal nerve stress which threatens their health and lives; that chiropractic can relieve 95% of general gynecological problems; that chiropractic patients have immune systems 200% greater than people who do not receive chiropractic; and that chiropractic improved respiratory function in patients suffering from a variety of respiratory diseases including bronchitis and emphysema.

If a prominent podiatrist had brochures printed that stated orthotics could cure heart disease, or a prominent physical therapist advertised that rehabilitation could cure sexually transmitted diseases, I would be willing to bet that the various associations would address these claims and issue statements before an outside agency could intervene. Obviously, the ACA and the ICA cannot respond to every questionable, exaggerated, bizarre or false claim made by chiropractors. Our associations, and perhaps our colleges, should make an a those contained in Dr. Koren's literature, the majority will not be attracted to chiropractors. They will shy away. When other health care professionals hear or read statements like these, referrals to chiropractors will decrease, with the exception of pre-existing, personal working relationships.

Another example of the kind of statement that deserves a response occurred in an article written

by Chris Mertz, DC, "The Art of Re-signing Patients."³ Dr. Mertz stated that to keep patients who feel good from losing direction and purpose (i.e., not returning), they should be x-rayed two to four times a year. Not only is a practice like this clearly harmful to patients, but it also hurts our profession. It gives our detractors the ammunition they need.

It is high time we admit there is nothing conservative, holistic or natural about endless care, creating addiction to manipulation, or making unsubstantiated, cure-all claims. On the contrary, an excellent argument can be made that the variety of tricks, techniques and claims still used by a large percentage of our profession to keep fully functional, asymptomatic people returning for care is fraudulent. I wonder how long it will take for our profession to realize that overutilization not only damages our reputation, but also costs us millions of dollars of business per year in lost referrals. I agree with John Triano, DC, PhD,¹ who stated that DCs who are concerned about what is happening with Dr. Koren should donate money toward research to prove what we do instead of supporting a legal team hired to defend claims that lack solid, scientific evidence. Finally, I would be willing to bet that Chris Mertz and his family are not being x-rayed four times a year.

References

1. FTC questions chiropractor's claims. *Dynamic Chiropractic* September 21, 1998;16(20):1.
2. Petersen DM Jr. No research, no advertise: the FTC sends a message. *Dynamic Chiropractic* September 21, 1998;16(20):3
3. Mertz C. The art of re-signing patients. *The Chiropractic Journal* March 1998;12(6):10.

JANUARY 1999