

Australian Medical Association Taken to Task

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT MOVES TO END AMA EFFORTS TO "EXCLUDE CHIROPRACTORS"

Editorial Staff

The efforts of the Australian Medical Association (AMA) to restrict chiropractic in Australia was reviewed in the *ACCC Journal*,¹ the official publication of the Australia Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC), the Australian counterpart of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission. The article, "The AMA and chiropractic: a trade practices viewpoint," chronicles the struggle of medicine and chiropractic to co-exist, both down under and in the United States. Until the passage of the State and Territory Competitive Policy Reform Acts of 1995, the Australian Medical Association was free to set whatever policies it wished against their members associating with doctors of chiropractic. For example, in 1977, the federal assembly of the Australian Medical Association passed this resolution:

"The Australian Medical Association does not recognize any exclusive dogma such as homeopathy, osteopathy, chiropractic and naturopathy. It is unethical for doctors to associate professionally with practitioners of such dogmas."

In 1981, the resolution was updated with the "s" word:

"The Australian Medical Association does not recognize any exclusive dogma such as homeopathy, osteopathy, chiropractic and naturopathy or any other practices which are not based on sound scientific principles.

Gone was the admonition that it was "unethical" to associate with the chiropractic profession on a professional level. Still, the AMA had not designed to recognize chiropractic et al. The professions of "exclusive dogma" were still the black sheep and herded far out to pasture. And AMA members weren't about to venture that far afield.

What the Australian Medical Association did was to affect a secondary boycott. A secondary boycott is where one party in concert with a second party takes action to restrict the supply of goods or services by a third party to a fourth party. In this case, the AMA worked in concert to restrict the ability of chiropractors to serve the people of Australia.

In September 1992, the AMA felt compelled to publish the little booklet *Chiropractic in Australia*. They reiterated their policy statement:

"The AMA maintains that a medical practitioner should at all time practice methods of treatment based on sound scientific principle, and accordingly does not recognize any exclusive dogma such as ... chiropractic..."

Today, the ACCC still receives many complaints about the "boycott" of chiropractors by the AMA. These complaints allege that the AMA policy still discourages MDs who are members of the AMA from:

- referring patients to chiropractors;

- sharing premises or practices with chiropractors;
- working alongside chiropractors in hospitals or other institutions where work places are shared by varied medical disciplines; and
- engaging in research work with chiropractors.

The ACCC has contacted the federal, state and territory branches of the AMA about these complaints and any policies or practices that would affect the way medical doctors and chiropractors interact. All branches of the AMA advised the ACCC that they had no policy prohibiting or discouraging members from dealing with chiropractors. The ACCC was told that individual members are free to decide whether or not they wish to form a professional association or alliance with chiropractors. This was in sharp contrast to a recent quote in the media by Dr. Gerald Segal, president of the Victoria Board of the AMA. He stated that it is unethical for AMA members to refer patients to chiropractors.²

The ACCC has already let it be known that AMA members are free to associate with chiropractors. The AMA will be required to publish an ACCC-produced statement to that effect in their journal to better inform their members. Should the AMA refuse, they will most likely be taken to court, not by the Australian chiropractors, but by the Australia Competition & Consumer Commission.

References

1. The AMA and chiropractic: a trade practices viewpoint. *ACCC Journal*, October 1998. p 7-11.
2. Experts back care battle. *Sunday Herald Sun*, October 19, 1997, p. 24.

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