

Focus on the Vertebral Subluxation

OPEN THE CONVERSATION TODAY, LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR TOMORROW

Words can change people's minds. They can move people to love, incite them to riot, or bring nations to war. Used well, language can bring clarity out of confusion; used poorly, it can obfuscate and obscure. Perhaps the greatest power of language lies in the ways we can use it to inform, educate and enlighten our fellow human beings.

I believe the chiropractic profession is missing a significant opportunity to use the power of words to educate the public about what we have to offer. Chiropractic has yet to meet the most basic challenge of any new endeavor, which is to establish a clear and distinctive identity. Our profession has struggled internally (and against external influences) to define and defend its right to exist. Yet in spite of licensure, acceptance, educational maturity and a rapidly growing awareness of chiropractic's value, I cannot say that the general public knows for sure what the profession offers.

Of course, I believe that it is, and always has been, up to chiropractors to communicate accurately and thereby create a clear consciousness of who we are and what we do. I also recognize and honor all the chiropractic communicators of the past for their efforts to accomplish this objective, but in the final analysis, we have not yet succeeded.

In looking forward to meeting this challenge, I hope chiropractic can emerge from the 21st century with the kind of universal recognition the chiropractic principle of health enhancement deserves. We need to help the public understand the value of chiropractic. To do that, we must first help them understand the concept of the vertebral subluxation. In fact, we must first introduce them to the concept of subluxation.

I propose that we adopt a profession-wide slogan, or positioning statement, as the marketing experts term it, which will help establish in the minds of potential health care consumers that the critical role of chiropractic lies in correcting vertebral subluxations. A positioning statement, or platform, is a concept used in marketing to establish a clear identity for a product or service and differentiate it from its competitors in a way that is meaningful to consumers. You are already very familiar with the positioning of organizations such as Volvo or the Disney company. When you hear Volvo, you probably think "safety." When you hear Disney, you most likely think "quality family entertainment." When consumers think of chiropractic, they should think "subluxation correction."

My suggested positioning statement for our profession is this: "Chiropractic - Correcting Subluxations Since 1895." Here is my rationale.

The conflicting viewpoints within the profession have given us years of name calling and controversy, and but almost every member of our profession, regardless of philosophic paradigm, technique convictions, practice style or payment plan, would agree that the subluxation is integral to chiropractic. We agree that vertebral subluxations exist and that they have a negative impact on health. We can unify around this one simple concept and, with this unity, communicate a potent, clear message to the public. Our practice objectives and activities may diverge beyond this, but almost all chiropractors can agree that our practice starts with the location, analysis and correction of vertebral subluxations. This strong positioning statement will identify this as the

central, unique service that we offer.

We need to own the word subluxation. We need to make it synonymous with chiropractic, so that when people hear "chiropractic," they think about subluxations. In this way, they'll begin to understand the purpose of chiropractic and why they should consider seeing a chiropractor. You may believe there are a myriad of other reasons, but we should be able to agree that the correction of vertebral subluxation is central to our practices, to our profession, and to improving the lives of our patients and prospective patients.

Only 10 percent of the U.S. population visit a chiropractor each year. Since 100 percent of the population have spines, there's plenty of room to grow. A pervasive, sustained, coherent public information campaign can drive the message home and eventually impact behavior. We've seen it work countless times in this country in the past few decades. When concerned, caring professionals organize behind a key message - whether it's stopping drunk driving, avoiding gum disease, wearing seat belts or putting bicycle helmets on kids - the public takes notice.

Chiropractic - Correcting Subluxations Since 1895

We have adopted this statement at Sherman College. I encourage all members of our profession to embrace and use it freely.* There are three essential components to it: chiropractic, correcting subluxations and since 1895.

The first component simply highlights the well-recognized name of our profession. Especially with the rapidly growing interest in (and acceptance of) alternative health care approaches, chiropractic is being viewed as a viable option. The inclusion of "since 1895" in the positioning statement builds on that acceptance and reinforces the concept that chiropractic is a legitimate, tested profession. The public today recognizes the word and connects it with a valid profession. Most importantly, the statement introduces the term "subluxation" into the general lexicon.

Some may argue that the term subluxation is jargon and won't be understood by the public. I think we underestimate the ability of the public to grasp new and highly technical information.

Consider how comfortable people are today using such terms as angioplasty, osteoporosis, gingivitis and cholesterol. These medical terms have been imbued with meaning through extensive patient education campaigns. If we could cause people to ask, "What is a subluxation?", it would open the door for all of us to explain how the chiropractic approach to health can enhance their lives.

Some may also argue that our profession does not enjoy the same level of funding that has stood behind the media blitzes staged by the professional associations of dentists and medical doctors. I think we underestimate the network that chiropractors, chiropractic colleges, our professional associations and all of the professional journals possess for communicating with the public. As a profession, we interact daily with hundreds of thousands of people who would be more likely to seek chiropractic care if they understood that a vertebral subluxation is harmful.

The Alliance for Chiropractic Progress has an outstanding opportunity to use this message right now within the major advertising and public relations campaign currently underway. Including this statement as a tagline in all current advertising and other communications materials seems to be the perfect vehicle at the perfect time.

Join Me in Sending the Message

I challenge every doctor of chiropractic, college president, association leader, journal editor, our

Sherman College alumni, and our chiropractic product manufacturers and suppliers to incorporate this statement into all written communications from your organizations. Use it as a tagline on your letterhead, business cards, signs, posters, brochures, advertisements, newsletters and newspapers. Any time you print something, include this statement. Our message will indeed get out there.

It's true that a five-word slogan cannot communicate the real purpose and benefit of regular chiropractic care. It can't communicate the extensive education doctors of chiropractic complete. And it can't communicate the messages of the millions of patients whose lives have been improved through chiropractic. But it can help to start the conversation. It's up to chiropractors to expound upon it and seize the opportunity to educate. We need to plant the seed in the public mind and then cultivate it consistently.

Vertebral subluxation is the centerpiece of our profession. Let's begin consistently sharing that message with others and see the progress we make over the next decade. This statement will convey a crucial message about our profession.

Developing public understanding of the existence of vertebral subluxations and their negative impact on health is critical to the long-term success of our profession. I know I could stop 10 people on the street today, and they would have no idea what a vertebral subluxation is. I'm sure the same was true about osteoporosis 20 years ago, but today the mainstream press is jammed with articles about improving bone density. It's no accident. It's the result of a sustained campaign of public education in the general and professional media and reinforcement in the practitioner's office.

I have a vision that in 2020, people will be talking about making sure they aren't subluxated. The mainstream press will be writing about how to make sure you're subluxation-free and how to pick your chiropractor. The public will also learn that chiropractors are specially trained to find, analyze, adjust and monitor vertebral subluxations. They will know that subluxations limit the expression of their inborn potential for health.

There's only one way to get there. We need to create a unique identity for chiropractic by building an awareness that the profession is connected to the correction of vertebral subluxation. Through this simple action, we may yet be able to create a clear and unambiguous identity for this principle and profession we hold so dear.

* To protect the accessibility of this statement, I have taken the precaution of copyrighting it. With the publication of this article, all who wish to use it have my unqualified permission to do so. My copyright will simply prevent any other party from restricting its use.

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