

## Who Are You?

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Take a good look around the health care landscape. Can you see it? Listen to the thoughts of your patients and members of your community. Can you hear them?

A dramatic change has been taking place before your eyes, but you may have missed it. Let's go back 40-some years and view health care when the medical doctor was god. The MD would note the patient's chief complaint, do a brief examination and then treat the condition. Patients accepted that the doctor knew best and put their faith in the doctor's judgment and superior education. The concept of "informed consent" didn't exist.

Patients had such confidence in MDs that few patients even thought about getting a second opinion; to do so was blasphemy. And those who went to a chiropractor were just plain foolish and got what they deserved.

As the son and grandson of doctors of chiropractic, I learned early on the attitudes of the medical establishment. There was no such thing as "alternative" or "complementary" medicine. In their minds, there was only medicine. Everything else was quackery.

I witnessed the rise of patient empowerment 20 years ago when my first two sons were born. The movement was led by expectant mothers who were beginning to question or resist medicine's domineering approach. Under that pressure, some MDs, under ideal circumstances, began to allow fathers into the delivery room.

If there was any inkling that the father might question the doctor's authority, the father was exiled to the lobby. I clearly recall a nurse complaining about my presence at my son's birth. As patient activists, we were encouraged to sign every treatment form: "Subject to my informed consent." That stipulation was frowned upon by the medical establishment.

To learn about breast feeding, you didn't ask your MD or the nurses. It would still be almost 20 years before the American Pediatric Association would endorse breast milk. You contacted La Leche League, who would send a knowledgeable woman to visit you in the hospital to instruct the mother on what she needed to know and explain the advantages of breast milk for the baby.

The evolution in the doctor/patient relationship continues. Many patients are the decision makers. A clear indication of that is witnessed by the drug companies moving their marketing dollars from physician-focused to consumer-focused advertising.

Today, an MD must not only explain the patient's condition, but also explain treatment alternatives and the associated risks. Some MDs have come to the point that they don't make a recommendation unless asked. They present the options and leave the room to let the patient decide.

Patients are questioning most everything. Vaccinations, those billion-dollar sacred cows of the drug companies, perhaps the last bastion of medical supremacy, are under intense scrutiny.

Given the patient climate, I ask the question again: Who are you? What is your role in the lives of your patients and the well being of your community? What do you stand for?

Drug companies and managed care organizations, trying to shape public opinion and define health, are bombarding consumers with opinions and mass advertising based on profit motives. Patient choice is expected, but who's presenting the choices?

Take a careful look at your role. You can see that "doctor" includes the responsibilities of healer, teacher, counselor and patient advocate. And while you may not feel like you can compete against the billions of drug advertising dollars directed at your patients, you have an advantage they can't buy: trust.

As the doctor of your patients and a member of your community, you are their source of health care information. You are the natural one to speak at luncheons and voice your opinion on the pages of the local newspaper and in interviews to your local radio programs.

When a health care issue arises, you should be calling the local reporters (with whom you should already have created existing relationships) and giving them the chiropractic side of the issue. You will be surprised at how often your position will be quoted if it is well-articulated and offered early on.

The issues of health should take you out of your office and into your community. Chiropractic may not have a million-dollar advertising budget, but it does have over 63,000 DCs who only need to reach 4,000 people each to inform the entire U.S. population.

Health is defined by the consumer. Health care is a response to their definition of health. To include chiropractic in that definition, we must all diligently present the chiropractic story to every consumer on a consistent basis. This is the only way we can secure and enhance chiropractic's position in their health care choices.

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