

All Membership Is Local

ACA has always been known as the national organization which promotes and protects the profession. And why not. We have a \$6.5 million budget, a staff of 40 full-time employees, and an active political action committee. We are sought out for opinions from major media like MSNBC, the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Our legislative team is one of the best among health care groups, having, among other things, successfully established the PARCA coalition, which initiated the interest in managed care legislation. We worked with the Association of Chiropractic Colleges in passing legislation which enhances our role in veterans affairs and in the Department of Defense project. Two years ago, we passed legislation which eliminated the x-ray requirements in Medicare, a provision that becomes effective in January 2000. The new CMT codes, which we helped establish, improve the bottom line for our doctors in Medicare and with third-party payers.

We also have an excellent litigation team headed by Mr. George McAndrews, who is directing ACA's lawsuit against the federal government. This suit has already resulted in an acknowledgement by HCFA that physical therapists can't be reimbursed under Medicare for performing spinal manipulation to correct a subluxation. This is significant, but we are only half-way home. If successful, our litigation will require all federal HMOs to have doctors of chiropractic available to perform spinal manipulation to correct a subluxation.

Being the organization which promotes and protects the profession isn't enough unless we can serve the individuals who are the profession. Former congressman and majority leader Tip O'Neil once said that all politics are local. We believe that all membership is local. We recognize that like the federal government, the ACA, if we aren't careful, can get caught up in our own importance and grand efforts and lose focus on the doctors who make our association strong. The leadership of the ACA doesn't intend to let this happen. We have already begun to bring new, bottom-line solutions to our constituency. We will continue along this path, all the while communicating for the profession a vision which seeks access to and utilization of safe, affordable, natural chiropractic care for all people through full integration of doctors of chiropractic into the health care delivery system. More importantly, we intend to listen to and act on our members' concerns.

This theme of responding to member needs permeated the recent meeting of the ACA House of Delegates. The delegates received a comprehensive membership plan, which included the results of a major membership survey and a series of focus groups with members and nonmembers. Instead of the meeting becoming bogged down in bylaw discussions, the subject instead was directed to the common problems facing the membership in their day-to-day lives coping with this new managed care environment. Our 60 delegates participated in a series of brainstorming sessions in which they relayed the concerns of their members and discussed strategies to deal with them.

A series of resolutions was passed to address these concerns, including issues of conflict of interest, protection of our right to do spinal manipulation, positioning the profession in the new health care environment, and a number of activities to improve our doctor's ability to participate on the community level.

A second House of Delegates meeting was also approved for the new fiscal year. This is a highly unusual decision. Most organizations are cutting back on their meetings. While we have streamlined many committee meetings, it was the consensus of the delegates that a second meeting of the full House of Delegates was necessary to more comprehensively address the problems their members were facing at the local level.

We want to hear from you: not just once or twice a year, but whenever you feel you need to communicate your concerns about our direction. If ACA is to strengthen our voice for the profession, we need your participation and insight. Visit our webpage at www.amerchiro.org or contact the ACA office at 1-800-986-4636 and we will provide you with the name of the delegate who represents you.

About the author: Dr. James Mertz, the newly elected president of the ACA, is from Albuquerque, New Mexico and has been in chiropractic practice for just over 40 years. Before his election to president, Dr. Mertz served as the ACA vice president (since 1997) and as president of the ACA Council of Delegates (1995-1997).

Dr. Mertz has been extremely active in the chiropractic profession at the state and national level. He served as ACA's New Mexico delegate (1982-1983 and 1990-1997) and as chairman of ACA's publications committee. Dr. Mertz has been president (1978-79) and vice president (1976-77) of the Council on Chiropractic Education. He was also the director of the Federation of Chiropractic Licensing Board (1976-82).

At the state level, he's been president of the New Mexico Chiropractic Association, and since 1992, chairman of its national legislative commission. Since 1993, he has served as New Mexico's chiropractic state representative for the Medicare/Physician Advisory Committee.

The St. Louis Chiropractors' Association awarded Dr. Mertz the "Professional Citation" (1968) and "Chiropractor of the Year" (1969). The Missouri State Chiropractors' Association awarded him "Chiropractor of the Year" in 1972; the Council on Chiropractic Education gave him the "Citation Award" (1980), and the "Recognition Citation" (1982). He was also honored as the New Mexico Chiropractic Association's 1993 "Chiropractor of the Year."

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