

Reflections on ACA and ICA

Michael Pedigo, DC

It's hard to believe, but on August 28, 1999, I completed my second year as president of the American Chiropractic Association. In 1988, I completed serving three years as president of the International Chiropractors Association. As I reflect back over those years of service to the profession and the associations, the fundamental reasons for this profession to unite under the roof of one association are unchanged. At the recent House of Delegates meeting, the ACA reconfirmed its willingness to meet and discuss any serious efforts to unify the profession. Unfortunately, I have seen no such indication from ICA.

Many of you may recall that while I was president of ICA, we twice almost brought about a merger of ACA and ICA. Twice, a majority of the ICA membership voted for merger based on a fair and reasonable document to both associations but failed to get the two-thirds majority vote required. What a shame!

The profession has been (and continues to be) hurt by that failure. An incredible amount of work went into arriving at a document that had the approval of the governing boards of both ACA and ICA. Three to four years were spent in creating 10 different drafts before a final document was presented for a vote.

The sad thing is the merger effort failed because some of those opposed to merger used false, misleading statements and outright lies about what the merger document said and what would happen if merger occurred. They said if the merger occurred, the new association would soon work to include drugs and surgery as part of chiropractic. They ran ads with pictures of pills, hypodermic needles and scalpels to frighten members. The ads worked, even though the document clearly stated drugs and surgery were not a part of chiropractic health care.

When merger failed the second time, I was chairman of the ICA board. I had a difficult decision to make. I knew the differences that divided the majority of ICA and ACA members were more false perception than fact. I'd been an ICA member since I was a first quarter student at Palmer and had many, many friends in ICA, but I also knew that ICA did not have the funds or membership size to protect and advance the profession so vital to our future. As a result, I resigned from ICA and joined ACA.

I ran for the office of delegate and was elected. Several years later, I was elected president of the ACA, and I can tell you that today, the differences that divide the majority of ACA and ICA members are still a matter of false perception. ACA is still the only national association that has made (and is consistently making) a difference in legislation and the legal arena.

Currently, ACA is in the heat of a legal battle with Medicare via a lawsuit to protect the patient's right to see a doctor of chiropractic to correct subluxations. ICA is nowhere to be found. I have twice written the ICA leadership and asked them to support this vital legal action. That was months ago, and I still have not had a reply.

It is now over 10 years since the last merger vote. ACA is as opposed to drugs and surgery as ever,

if not more so. The reasons used to kill the merger are just as incorrect now as they were then. I see no valid reasons that will stand up to logical, rational reasoning for merger not to occur. There are plenty of reasons based on false, incomplete data and just plain emotions.

Some argue that it's good to have two associations, like we have Republicans and Democrats. That may sound good to some, until you ask, how many presidents do we have? We have an election and elect one president, be it a Republican or Democrat, but not both. Can you imagine what it would be like having two presidents of the United States and two houses of Congress? That's what our profession has, and we wonder why it is so difficult to get things done.

The cost factor of maintaining two associations is huge. Both associations have overhead costs of what I call up and down lifting. Those costs must be paid before any productive work is done, i.e., office building costs and everything involved with two staffs, including salaries for duplicate work and the costs of double meetings of each association's respective elected officials.

After those costs, then (and only then) are there funds for doing the work you expect your association to do to protect and advance the profession. The smaller the association, the larger the percentage of the budget goes for the up and down lifting. One of the major reasons I resigned from ICA was because so much of the budget was spent on the up and down lifting, there was very little left to do anything else. That has not changed today.

ACA, while having a much larger membership base and budget, still does not have enough to do all the things it needs to do. It is very disappointing to see what could and needs to be done but can't be done because of a lack of funds. That is compounded when I look at the huge percentage of the profession that does not belong to either association. While I believe the most effective use of your dues dollars would be spent by belonging to ACA, everyone should belong to one association or the other.

I hear many say they will not join until the two associations merge. That is just an excuse to let someone else carry your load. If you want to make a difference, join and work to change things from the inside. If everyone waited for there to be a merger before joining, there would be no associations. With no associations, we have no profession. Unfortunately, I see no significant signs of merger in the near future. Nonetheless, we must do the best we can with what we have to protect and advance our profession. We must not quit, no matter what.

OCTOBER 1999