

Food for Thought 1998

G. Douglas Andersen, DC, DACBSP, CCN

A front page article in the October 20, 1997 edition of Dynamic Chiropractic caught my eye. The Alliance for Chiropractic Progress, a group composed of both the ACA and ICA, is preparing to begin what they state is a historic public-education campaign. Without saying it, I am assuming this campaign is being pursued because the percentage of the population that utilizes chiropractors is relatively small and stagnant, with estimates ranging generally in the area of 15%.

The article stated that the initial focus will be on the educational and relicensing requirements of chiropractors. After reading that, I began to think about why more people do not go to chiropractors. I believe that there is probably a percentage of the population that really does not know much about chiropractors, and by publicizing our education and relicensing requirements, we will garner more patients. I believe there is another segment of the population that is unable to utilize chiropractors for financial or insurance reasons. That leaves the third and apparently largest group: people who choose not to go to chiropractors.

We live in a time of unprecedented openness and accountability when it comes to the media and related issues. Honesty is the best way to get out our message. I'm hoping the Alliance will be honest with the public and inform them that there are a wide variety of chiropractors who employ many different practice patterns. I would like to see the ad campaign educate the public on the options available when they are looking for a chiropractor. For example:

1. Members of the public who agree that x-rays are very important to diagnose problems should be informed that there are many chiropractors who will gladly x-ray the vast majority of their patients. Not only that, these chiropractors have the ability to find abnormalities on x-rays that a radiologist will pronounce normal. When a person feels better, these chiropractors will be happy to take more x-rays to prove that the improvement is not psychologic, but in fact can be demonstrated on x-ray. If the x-rays show that there is still a problem, many of these chiropractors will continue to provide treatment and will not be tricked into releasing a person simply because they feel great.
2. The public should also be aware that not every chiropractor will treat the entire spine every visit. For example, if a person has low back pain, some chiropractors will just treat the lower back. However, there are other chiropractors who, for no extra charge, are happy to give a person's neck a nice, hard crack even though it doesn't hurt. How many times have we heard a person say, "I went to a chiropractor with lower back pain. He didn't crack my neck, so I'm not going back."
3. The Alliance should proudly proclaim that there are some members of our profession who have the amazing ability, just by pushing an arm or pulling a leg, to diagnose nutritional deficiencies as well as a wide variety of internal diseases, disorders, and dysfunctions. Imagine how proud our entire profession would be if the Alliance would run a TV commercial showing a videotape of one of these doctors discovering that, for example, a patient's back pain was caused by a blocked ileocecal valve missed by their internist. Even more impressive would be observing them reopen bowels without drugs or surgery.

4. Consumers should be informed that not all chiropractors will assume complete responsibility for their health. People need to know that there are chiropractors who specialize in wellness and maintenance care and truly want to be "your chiropractor for life." These doctors will not release a patient simply because they feel good. In fact, they will never release anyone and provide literature with scientific references as to why it is so important for everyone to have chiropractic care for their entire lives.
5. Our advertising campaign should also highlight those chiropractors who not only want to heal people, but want to make them wealthy as well. The public should be informed that there are a growing number of doctors who will be happy to become business partners with their patients and show them how to get rich by selling special vitamins, weight loss products, air filters, water filters, and other items that improve human health so well they are not sold in stores. These chiropractors will train their patients how to sell these exclusive products. They will also show their patients how to recruit others, establish networks, and build their own businesses.
6. We must address and publicize the fact that there are chiropractors who, in many cases, may dare to treat patients without x-rays. It is common for this type of chiropractor not to manipulate areas that are asymptomatic. They tend to release people when they feel better; in fact, they generally will do everything they can to treat people as little as possible. These chiropractors do not believe that endless chiropractic care can prevent anything, but instead emphasize the importance of living a healthy lifestyle, balancing proper nutrition, fitness, rest, and mental well-being.

Of course, the Alliance should let the public know that if they go to a chiropractor of this type, have good results, and get discharged, and are then unhappy because they want continued care, they should seek a second opinion with another chiropractor. It must be emphasized that just because a person feels good and has been released by one chiropractor, it does not mean that all chiropractors would release that same patient. By seeking out second opinions with other chiropractors, the consumer may discover that their spines aren't straight, their feet aren't level, or their muscles aren't perfectly balanced. They will be informed how critical it is to continue care to solve these "problems," even if it takes years to accomplish.

In closing, I feel the reason many people do not utilize chiropractors is that they do not know what to expect and are confused about different stories they may hear from people who do go. By educating the public as to what types of chiropractors are available in the marketplace, we will reduce the chances of people having negative experiences, and if a person is not happy with one type of chiropractor, they will no longer have the misconception that all chiropractors practice the same way.

*G. Douglas Andersen, DC, DACBSP, CCN, DACBN
Brea, California*

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