

## In the Spotlight

### TAKING CENTER STAGE CAN BE UNCOMFORTABLE AT TIMES

Donald Petersen Jr., BS, HCD(hc), FICC(h)

If you've even been on a stage in front of a large crowd, there are two things you notice immediately: the lights are too bright and too hot. But for people to see you from all parts of the arena, there must be strong lighting aimed at the stage from many directions.

This intense light and heat is a metaphor for the recent events involving the vaulted presence of chiropractic upon the national stage. In less than 30 days, chiropractic has had an unprecedented amount of exposure:

- Two papers in the October issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)*;
- An extremely positive segment ("New Attitudes"), Oct. 29th on Lifetime's evening news magazine;
- A scathing expose on "20/20" (November 6th);
- A sting on "Extra" (November 7th);
- Several papers in the November issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* that focused on chiropractic and other forms of alternative health care;
- A historical/investigational look at chiropractic in an even-handed paper in the November issue of the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

But like a person new to being in front of the television cameras, the chiropractic profession is clumsy and awkward in its presentation to the world. We have been talking to ourselves for so long, that we didn't notice when the world began listening. Now that they are, we are a bit uncomfortable.

Fortunately, we are quickly learning how the media game is played. After the disastrous headlines generated by the *NEJM* papers, the chiropractors involved in the *JAMA* study (Geoffrey Bove, DC, PhD, and Niels Nilsson, DC, MD, PhD) took extra precaution to eliminate any statements that could be misunderstood by the media or misused by *JAMA*.

But correcting our mistakes is only the first step. What really needs to happen is a constant process of learning and creating. We must become proactive in our interactions with the media. The chiropractic profession must take control by issuing our own press releases when presenting our research to the world. It should be part of the budget for every research grant provided by every chiropractic organization. Public relations should also be part of the budget of every chiropractic research publication. It's obviously the case with *NEJM* and *JAMA*; they were the ones holding press conferences the day before each of the chiropractic papers were published.

We have something to say and the public wants to hear it.

We have fought long and hard to be recognized and acknowledged by the world as an efficacious health care profession. Now that we have their attention, it's time to impress the world with the value and benefits of chiropractic.

The spotlight will be on chiropractic as long as we have something to say. If we stand around

nervously twiddling our fingers, the spotlight will move to something more interesting.

It's time to show 'em what we've got.

DECEMBER 1998