

## Braggin' Rights for Chiropractors

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Much has been written and said about what it will take for the chiropractic profession to grow and prosper, if not survive, in the changing years. The factors most addressed are scientific research, quality education, professional integrity, and an assertive public relations program with the media and legislature. Which of these would you say are the most important? Let's discuss them.

### Research

The government is increasing its control of health care with mandates which demand proof of effectiveness, or the claims may be rejected. This will be across the board for all health care providers. The recent government studies, and especially the acute low back pain guidelines published by the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research (AHCPR), have given chiropractic a great boost. But most of us will agree that chiropractic can also help with headaches, stress related ailments, asthma, and some somatovisceral ailments. We will need more studies in this area and there have been heroic efforts within our profession to accomplish this goal. We have scientific studies to support what we do, but I'll bet if you stop 100 people on the street, they won't know that. And I'll further bet you that a good number of them will think that chiropractic does not have any scientific evidence to support it and that you may have a stroke if you get an adjustment. The public needs to be educated on the facts.

### Education

We've come a long way since forming the Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE). Not enough chiropractors realize and appreciate what a milestone and credit the CCE is to our profession. To think that our colleges have attained superior facilities within a climate of public ignorance and prejudice is all the more impressive. Of course, I'm referring to the remarks made by Dr. John McMillan Mennell who said that a chiropractic college he visited had the finest anatomy and dissection department he has ever seen in his life. This is saying something when you consider that this internationally recognized author and medical/orthopedic professor has taught or has been a guest speaker at most of the medical schools in America. I have visited most of the chiropractic colleges in America and they all have great facilities. What is even more amazing is that it was done without the billions of dollars that medical schools get every year from the state and federal governments. This is the end product of a competitive spirit and a commitment to excellence based on pride. Our colleges had something to prove and they did it in a grand style giving them real "braggin' rights." Professional Integrity

The code of ethics of our national associations are as tough as possible while still being constitutionally sound. And then we have the Mercy Center Guidelines which were designed to improve the standards and quality of health care that we deliver. These are the actions of a profession seeking to be the best it can be.

Chiropractic does have one problem which is universal to all professions: that it is inhabited by human beings, and being the creatures that we are, we will always have a few individuals who will be dishonest. The question is not whether dishonesty in our profession exists, but how the profession deals with it. If the members of our profession look the other way, they invite disgrace on chiropractic. And since we are a minority profession there is a natural tendency for people to

generalize and condemn an entire group because of a few dishonest ones. We cannot and must not tolerate it within our ranks.

If an MD gets into some kind of trouble, the public will view it as just that: an MD getting into trouble. But if a chiropractor gets into trouble there is a tendency to paint the entire profession with the same brush. It also applies when an MD doesn't get results with a patient. The patient will say that he or she hasn't found the right MD. On the other hand if a chiropractor doesn't get results patients are more likely to say they "tried chiropractic" but it didn't help them.

We have seen instances where a state enacted legislation adversely affecting all chiropractors because of one or two offenders. By the same token, I have never seen a state pass a law that would mandate that a surgeon consult with a chiropractor before being allowed to operate on someone's spine, even though an estimated 80,000 unnecessary disc surgeries are performed annually according to "CBS News," and the AHCPR judged that there was too much surgery being done in America. The double standard is not fair, but then life is not always fair. We just have to work all that much harder to bring honesty and fair play in health care. This brings us to the fourth factor.

## Assertive Public Relations

What this profession has accomplished should serve as a living example for other minority groups to embrace and emulate. Everyone else brags about the AMA's products and services. Just turn on the radio or TV for a few minutes and listen to all of the commercials. As Don Petersen brought out in his column "Implementation -- The Final Frontier" (in the 12/2/96 issue), the AMA sends 4,000 news releases plus video dispatches to 340 TV outlets every week. And if that isn't enough the AMA sends an additional 5,000 medical reports to radio stations every day. By comparison, what we have been able to do to compete? Could you imagine what this profession could accomplish if we had every chiropractor supporting our national organizations with membership? Considering that less than 25 percent of our profession supports a national organization, yet it was able to get a 15.5 increase in Medicare payments under the new fee schedule. Let's get the other 75 percent of the chiropractors to support their leaders. They deserve it.

We have a lot to brag about, but somehow take it for granted and not take it to the media. We need chiropractors to form speaker bureaus in every state and learn how to avail ourselves of this free exposure and how to respond to critical questions and circumstances as they arise. The public needs to be better educated on chiropractic.

Which of the above four factors are the most important? They are like the four wheels on an automobile. You'll not get anywhere without all of them. But we need to get the message out for the world to realize the merit of chiropractic. Public education is like the fuel necessary to propel that vehicle.

I remember a story that my Godfather told me about when he was a student at the Palmer College of Chiropractic. Dr. B.J. Palmer asked his students how many of them had ever eaten a duck's egg. There was no response. He then asked how many of them had eaten a hen's egg. Of course, they all responded affirmatively. He discussed the nutritional advantages of a duck's egg. He then went on to explain how a duck hides her eggs in the mud while a chicken announces her new arrival by cackling. And so chiropractic has been around now for 100 years. It's about time we were more assertive with telling the world about this wonderful profession called chiropractic.

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