

## Managed Care: Who's Really Behind the Wheel?

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The leading question I encounter among chiropractic practitioners and other health care professionals as I travel the country is, "Who's driving the managed care system?" To properly respond to this we must first recognize that managed care is presently controlled by the insurance companies, HMOs and PPOs. If we are to take control of its future direction, we must empower the public by educating them to chiropractic at the patient level. Gaining this position of power will enable the consumer of health care services to direct the actions of insurance companies and other health care authorities to change the way existing rules and practice limitations are imposed.

However, it is our job as practitioners and educators to communicate and educate the consumer to what we do to keep them in the "driver's seat." This is the approach we should adopt as a profession. Chiropractic should be taking the lead in this educational process, explaining the benefits of chiropractic, educating individuals about the tremendous power that lies within the healing potential of this great profession.

To adopt such a stance and to provide the necessary leadership to ensure success for our efforts will advance the profession in a positive way. Constantly complaining about the restrictions proposed in most managed care plans is in my opinion counterproductive. Though it may relieve some of the frustration we feel, complaining doesn't address the problem of educating the consumer about the benefits of chiropractic. Can you imagine what a concerted effort by practitioners could accomplish if the profession decided to make patient education a national goal? The resulting groundswell demanding chiropractic care would be unprecedented.

The first step in our educational plan is to encourage and provide the tools necessary for these dedicated and faithful recipients of chiropractic benefits, our patients, to become engaged in the struggle. Speak with them about involvement. Provide sample letters to be sent to managed care organizations and insurance companies, along with messages to state and national legislators. There are a myriad of ways to reach those in positions of power and influence. We need to educate as many individuals as possible to what chiropractic is and what we do as primary health care providers. The need to articulate this chiropractic message is stronger now than at any other time in the history of the profession. If we do our job well, the next century could well be referred to as the century of alternative health care. This should be our consuming desire.

In stark contrast to its early days, chiropractic today is in a position of leadership. We have attained this position through the sophisticated and sound educational program that has evolved over the last 100 years. The education our students receive easily meets the standards of any other health care profession. Moreover, I see the quality of chiropractic education as the key to chiropractic's future. History bears witness that education has been the single most influential factor involved in the exponential progress of the profession.

Continuing to improve the quality and broaden the scope of chiropractic education is at the heart of NYCC's mission. I am pleased to report that the college has made exceptional strides in this area. A complete revision of our curriculum is currently underway which will expand the options available to students as they prepare for their future chiropractic careers.

NYCC has also developed a state-of-the-art research program, which we feel will significantly advance the science of the chiropractic profession and enhance the education NYCC students receive. It is our hope that through research we will be able to scientifically attack the public's narrow view of a chiropractor's range of expertise, and help validate the practical benefits of the profession in the eyes of an often incredulous managed care system.

Current trends and surveys indicate that more and more people are beginning to investigate a wider array of alternatives to the more traditional forms of medical treatment. If these trends continue, changes will occur in the way managed care perceives chiropractic and other alternative forms of health care. And I firmly believe education and communication will be the catalysts of these changes.

Recently I read a survey in a family medical magazine asking individuals why they are now using alternative care. The responses were very encouraging, for they reflect a greater awareness by the public of alternative care. The survey indicated that high percentages of people utilized non-traditional forms of health care for wellness, injury prevention and special health problems: back pain; headaches; emotional problems; neck pain; and a host of other conditions. Though the trend is positive, there is still room for significant movement when it comes to educating people to the tremendous benefits offered by chiropractic. We must expand our educational efforts as we communicate and educate individuals to the total scope of chiropractic practice.

It is also imperative that we communicate the powerful chiropractic message of wellness from a strong position of unity. This will gain chiropractic more ground than anything else we could do. As a unified profession, we will be better able to seize the opportunities open to us as we move forward into the next century as healers of the nations. If we do our job, there is no question who will be behind the wheel of managed care in the future -- it will be consumer driven!

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