

We Need a National PR Campaign ... It's Coming, Thanks to ACA & ICA

Michael Pedigo, DC

There have been many leadership and brainstorming sessions, both on the national and state levels, across the country the past few years. To my knowledge, each has concluded that the number one need of the chiropractic profession is a national program to educate the public about chiropractic. It's easy to get support and excitement for such a concept, but reality quickly sets in when it comes time for the planning stage of how we are going to fund such an effort. What usually happens is the subject is changed, because it is such an awesome task with so little funds. Most people think of advertising on television when they think of a national PR campaign, and for good reason -- without a doubt, it is the best way to change public opinion. TV is the only means of reaching 10-20 million people with one commercial. Spending \$800,000 would buy one week of advertising -- maybe.

Be that as it may, it is clear our profession must expand its market share to meet the needs of a growing profession. Even more important, millions upon millions of people that could (and should) benefit from the health care services we offer are suffering needlessly because they do not know about the benefits our profession has to offer.

The problem goes deeper than just "not knowing." We must change perceptions, false and misleading perceptions created by years of lies and propaganda by the AMA. Perceptions once created are not easily changed. We have an obligation to properly educate society about our profession. The time has come to stop talking about doing something and "just do it."

Furthermore, there has never been a better time to do so. With all the changes in the health care market place and the government and insurance companies insisting more and more on paying for only cost effective health care, the positive outcome studies and consumer satisfaction surveys about our profession make us a desirable health care choice.

For the past year, ACA and ICA have been working to develop a national PR program. The Alliance for Chiropractic Advancement has been created. All chiropractic organizations and vendors have been invited to be a part of this effort. On September 27, 1997 the steering committees of ACA and ICA for the Alliance met and approved a PR firm that will create the program that will be implemented.

Clearly, we do not have the budget to do the kind of massive program we would love to do, but we are committed to getting the job done. Both ACA and ICA have committed to fund this program at \$300,000 each for at least three years. We will need to raise additional funds. The more we raise, the more we can do.

This will be a nationwide effort, the first ever joint venture of this kind. This is a call to arms for the entire profession. Do not sit back and say it won't work! If we all support this effort we can do amazing things, something our profession has done time and time again. It can and will work with your help and support.

For this program to be successful, it's important that you not expect it to fill your offices with patients overnight. We just do not have the kind of funds that would take. This is a long term project directed at changing the public's perception about the chiropractic profession. People need to be receptive to the message. That becomes much easier when they view the profession as highly educated health care professionals. That will be the first step in the program.

Actually, the first phase will have three parts. A couple of years ago, ACA held some focus groups of consumers to find out how they perceived the chiropractic profession. It was very surprising, almost shocking, that so many in the focus groups in this day and age still had no concept of the education doctors of chiropractic must go through to be in practice.

Furthermore, many said that once they learned about our education, they would now go to a DC if the need arose. So the primary reason the first part of the program will be focused on the chiropractors education is because of the importance of changing society's perception about our profession: it is the foundation from which to build upon.

In addition to a national campaign to change the perception about education, part two of phase one will be to create a PR package for state associations to use as they see fit in their states; part three will be to create a PR package for the individual doctor to use in his/her practice to stimulate new patients. This three-pronged approach will allow us to maximize our funds and efforts towards an effective PR campaign. I am very excited about the potential this program has. As this program is developed you will learn more about it and how you can support it and use it.

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