

Alternative or Mainstream?

A position paper from the Netherlands Chiropractors' Association
for the World Federation of Chiropractic

The discussion of whether chiropractic is mainstream or alternative has been going on for some time, and will certainly not be over after this paper. The discussion has come to a bit of a head with the attention of the World Federation of Chiropractic in taking a position as adapted by the member countries.

Conventional or mainstream medicine could simply be described as that which is taught at the medical colleges. And as such we do not fit the description. Try to become a member of the AMA, and see what happens.

But a lot of what happens in medicine happens after the formal education. Medical colleges and hospitals work with experimental medicines and techniques. Are they alternative? Parapsychology would seem quite alternative to many. Thermography has risen to more acceptance today. And of course many medical doctors choose to do alternative, or less accepted treatments. Even only a couple of years ago, testing for food or other allergies and intolerance was very irregular and unscientific. Now it is being done in hospitals by medical specialists.

When does mainstream cease to be mainstream and turn into alternative? If an MD did chiropractic, would it then be mainstream? And as suggested by others, chiropractic is becoming mainstream for low back pain, but not for ear infections.

The accepted knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and so forth, is the basis for our work. But where does one look for the mainstream data banks on innate?

Research has put us in a position of doing something that seems to work. And that is where other professions fail. Most of what is done by mainstream medics has never been effectively demonstrated by the scientific method. Yet they remain mainstream. We are not.

Chiropractic has definitely come out of the alternative corner. Research has helped, but also our position and attitude towards our historical rivals and enemies, the medics. We are promoting and conducting ourselves in a professional manner (we hope), showing and describing our work, making the information accessible to all interested parties. Possibly in part due to us, alternative treatments have become more interesting. There are journals, some money for research, and even a U.S. Office of Alternative Medicine.

It would seem that there is a line with mainstream and alternative at opposing ends, with a continuum between, which encompasses all the forms of treatments done by all forms of practitioners. There is no formal spot or border at which something is deemed mainstream or alternative. The terms are actually a hoax, undefinable entities that exist mostly in the minds of those who need to quantify in a manner which does no justice to that which is being judged.

We are developing an identity. There is a place for us in modern health care. We are becoming accepted on our own terms. We can and must speak the same language as other medical

professionals. The multi-disciplinary approach is taking hold, and we are starting to play by the rules of the scientific community. (Rules that are not made by the medical mainstream). It may seem a dirty word to some, but we seem to be integrating!

Are we then mainstream? We still do not fit the definition. Chiropractic is not taught at medical colleges. Without the MD degree you are not mainstream. This title has historically meant political and social power. A tight, well organized group of people who promulgate and maintain power, they are not going to welcome outsiders without "the degree."

But do we want that? Do we want to be mainstream? Are we not an alternative? Are we not complementary to regular medicine? And what have they ever done for us? We have enough scars and professional insecurities to last us a long while.

So now we join the club? Forget it. Let us remain separate but equal. We cannot force ourselves into mainstream, and must keep our education distinct and unique, while aspiring to university recognition and federal subsidizing.

We are an alternative to the use of medicine and operations. We stimulate the body and, the mind (we hope) in natural healing. Mainstream treats disease with the philosophy that the body is unable to heal itself. We stimulate the body in exactly this extraordinary ability.

We are not one of them and should not want to be. Our conduct should be that of impeccable professionals. We must demand the respect that our profession deserves. If alternative means an inferior position to mainstream, we are not that. But we are also not a part of the regular medical training or philosophy. Our position must remain separate but equal.

We are not alternative, nor are we mainstream. We are chiropractors.

Netherlands Chiropractors' Assoc.
Heuvel 8 B
4901 KC Oosterhout
The Netherlands

JUNE 1996