

Desperately Seeking Chiropractic in the Military

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I would like to share a long overdue response to the "DC" issues concerning the three-year Chiropractic Health Care Demonstration Project in the military.

I am a 1990 graduate of Palmer College of Chiropractic in Davenport, Iowa, who believed that all my financial obligations incurred in school (in excess of \$80,000) would be more than affordable after graduating and opening a practice. Things did not go exactly as planned. I did practice after graduation, and also completed a clinical teaching residency at PCC with an emphasis in radiology and orthopedics. Unfortunately, after three years of struggling with student loan payments of \$800 per month, I decided to join the U.S. Army under the Student Loan Repayment Program (SLRP).

Under the SLRP, I received \$55,000 over three years, cutting my student loan repayment to below half of what I owed upon graduation. The catch, if you will, of the SLRP was that I could not enter the U.S. Army as a commissioned officer like many other allied health care professionals. I was required to enter on an enlisted status. The highest rank I could enter was that of a specialist at the pay grade of E-4. The MOS (military occupational specialty) I chose was radiologic technologist.

After one year at the U.S. Army Academy of Health Sciences at Ft. Sam Houston, Texas, I completed the radiologic technologist school. I have since passed the national registry.

The radiology experience in the military has been great, but I have discovered first hand that chiropractic care is needed desperately in the military. I have seen literally hundreds of cases of cervical, thoracic, and lumbar pain that go unresolved, only to see the soldier medically discharged. This is not to mention all the other cases, the non-spine specific complaints that go unresolved, where chiropractic care would be beneficial.

Yet our government continues to spend millions of tax dollars training soldiers in various specialties to keep the combat readiness of our nation, only to discharge them to the civilian sector with valuable job skills before they have fulfilled their military obligation.

In December 1994, I read "DC"'s article about the Chiropractic Demonstration Project in the military, and promptly contacted the subcommittee working on the project. I informed them of my chiropractic and military background and expressed my interest in participating in the project.

Finally in May of 1995 the project moved forward and started its application process. I sent an extensive application packet to Aliron International, the company awarded the contract to screen applicants for the demonstration project. Although they were very interested in my application, my being in the Army was considered a conflict of interest, as the demonstration project was a military/government enterprise.

I was extremely disappointed, believing that my five years of clinical experience, military background, and military health care experience would have been more of a positive asset than a negative one. Fortunately my military experience has taught me a valuable lesson: You must adapt, overcome, and drive on.

I had fully intended to write about this matter many months ago, but as an active duty soldier with the 24th Infantry Division (MECH), a rapid deployment division, I have been deployed out of the country for the last nine months on and off, mostly on. My purpose for telling this story is not to elicit sympathy, for I chose to join the military, but to point out that chiropractic care is truly needed in the military health care system. During my last two deployments I have been bombarded with patients seeking chiropractic care within a day or two of hitting the ground. Those of you who have been in the military know that rumors, be they positive or negative, travel fast. The rumor that a chiropractor is on post spreads like wildfire! No practice management needed here, you have an instant practice.

I am currently serving on a mission in Kuwait. On a daily basis I have soldiers come to me who have followed the typical medical protocol and have not attained results. The majority of these cases would be considered by DCs as resolvable with routine chiropractic care. Many of the soldiers who seek chiropractic care serve in the Special Forces/Rangers. These elite soldiers understand the value of chiropractic care especially well because they participate in extremely rigorous physical and mental training, such as Airborne and special warfare tactics. Being assigned to the 24th Infantry Division at Ft. Stewart, Georgia, a heavy mechanized division, many soldiers in the infantry and tank units desperately need chiropractic care. Anyone who has been in the military will tell you that the military is physically and mentally demanding; it's part of the job.

With the recent military drawdown, we currently have fewer soldiers to accomplish the mission. The defense of our nation and our interests abroad depend on the physical and mental health of our soldiers. We simply cannot afford to have soldiers out of work or on lengthy profiles. This not only decreases unit morale, but also makes mission accomplishment much more difficult.

Chiropractic care is essential to the combat readiness of our military. I sincerely hope that the 20 civilian DCs who were chosen for the demonstration project are aware of how important this project is for the chiropractic profession, and for those soldiers who desperately need chiropractic care. Keep in mind that these soldiers must pay for care out-of-pocket on their small monthly salaries.

I place great faith in those involved in the demonstration project, and that they too will "adapt, overcome, and drive on" when they are faced with the many obstacles they will undoubtedly encounter over the next two years. As many of you already know, the military is sometimes a very frustrating organization to work for. I ask you to be leaders, not followers, and chiropractic will prove itself easily.

Like other allied health care professionals, I can only hope that in the near future, those of us who wish to serve our country can do so as doctors of chiropractic, and as commissioned officers.

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