

Was Dr. Dolittle a Chiropractor?

CAN WE TALK TO ALL THE ANIMALS?

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In the movie "Dr. Dolittle," Rex Harrison demonstrated how different life could be if people and animals could talk to each other. Farmers, pet owners or anyone interested in an animal's point of view fantasized about what they might hear from their favorite aquatic, feathered, or furry friend. Unfortunately, in the movie Dr. Dolittle never taught anyone else how to talk to the animals, so the benefits were exclusively his.

As chiropractic has moved forward into the mainstream of health care, chiropractors need to learn how to better communicate with various health care "animals":

Attorneys

Utilization Reviewers

Claims Representatives

Medical Directors

Workers' Comp. Administrators

Gatekeepers

Case Managers

Legislators

Primary Care Providers

Newspaper Reporters

Mediators

And while you probably don't think about it very much, each one of these "animals" speaks a different language.

How we communicate and the attitude we present to others can have a startling effect on how they respond. Unfortunately, most of these health care professionals already view chiropractors with some trained bias. Our failure to tell our own story, combined with the intentional efforts of the AMA and others, has given chiropractic a soiled reputation that must be overcome in almost every relationship.

Recognizing this trained bias, many DCs take on a rather militant determination. They arm themselves with research claims, logical arguments and philosophical fervor much like a gladiator going to battle in a Roman coliseum. And while this may have scored some victories years ago, some enter the arena armed to the teeth only to find themselves in the midst of a baseball game. We're intent on going to war when the other professionals just want to know, "Can we play?"

Obviously, our attitudes can sometimes embarrass us without our even realizing it. Sometimes a more subtle approach can open the lines of communication without a lot of bloodshed.

There is a pattern to the inquiry that an interested health care professional may ask when trying to establish a relationship with a DC. Sometimes they come right out with it. Other times they ask around it. Ultimately, how you present yourself and the way you represent the chiropractic

profession will not only affect your relationship with that professional, but their opinion of chiropractors in general.

The Stepping Stones to Trust

Every relationship is based on honesty and trust. Many other health care professionals are looking to you with some degree of trained bias. You will need to overcome that bias, and then begin to build a trusting relationship.

Ultimately, you must remember who you are talking to and their vantage point. They are usually looking to see if you are a responsible provider, able to work within the system, and capable of presenting the case honestly to all parties involved.

Unfortunately, a trusting relationship doesn't happen overnight. If we are going to be part of the health care team, we have to work with the other players and demonstrate our value. In many ways, we will have to earn our position over time.

Most of the time, this will happen one-on-one. But recognize that the computer age will allow an entire company to form an opinion about you as a provider without ever meeting you. Perhaps the old axiom, "Actions speak louder than words," might be adapted to the new world of health care: "Outcomes speak louder than words."

The only way to erase the impressions left by our "few bad apples" is by example. Don't try to argue the past. Your actions will easily prove what chiropractic is and what chiropractors believe.

While health care reform may have your head spinning, some things never change. We build relationships on honesty, communication, and trust, and these relationships, both professional and personal, are the underpinnings of everything else in our lives.

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OCTOBER 1996