

Academic Affairs Mean More than Instruction

Joseph Keating Jr., PhD

Among those of our educators who also participate or follow scholarly activities in the profession, there is an understanding that is most aptly and humorously conveyed by Al Adams, DC, "Teaching without research is like confession without sin." Alas, it is not a widespread understanding in chiropractic circles. Like our osteopathic cousins, the educational institutions in chiropractic have traditionally viewed their roles primarily, if not exclusively, in terms of the production of successive generations of DCs, or what Ken DeBoer, PhD, has referred to as brand-new, old-fashioned doctors. Unlike the osteopathic schools, our colleges remain isolated from universities, teaching hospitals, and other centers of scholarly activity. Most chiropractic colleges continue to be poverty-stricken operations which rely almost exclusively upon tuition for their operating budgets. After nearly 60 years of painful efforts at self-improvement, we have developed, in DeBoer's terms, the world's finest trade school. Scholarly excellence, however, has generally eluded us.

Part, perhaps the major part, of this problem is the lack of recognition that something is missing. This reality manifests itself in many ways. National professional leaders have emphasized how far we have come rather than how far we have to go, and in recent memory, at least one prominent chiropractic official publicly declared that our schools are "no problem." Federal recognition of our accrediting agency is too often perceived as the pinnacle of academic achievement. National board scores are misconstrued by school officials as ultimate indices of an institution's academic prowess. Faculty are recruited and promoted without significant weight given to applicants' scholarly track records. Academic quality is erroneously equated with student satisfaction, and scholarly rigor (which may cause grumbling among the tuition-payers) may be perceived as a nuisance. Students who do stay abreast of the literature may be frustrated by instructors who do not. Instructional coordinators, some with no exposure to higher education outside chiropractic, are labeled deans of academic affairs. A consumer mentality prevails at many of our schools, such that the student body, rather than the faculty, are seen as the core of the institution. Such unfortunate perceptions are amplified at a few institutions wherein overbearing administrations deal with faculty as interchangeable (and easily replaceable) parts who serve at the pleasure of the "prez." Research is all too commonly viewed primarily as a means of proving what we always knew was true, so as to increase reimbursement for clinical services.

Trivial percentages of college budgets are committed to research activities, ostensibly because the primary mission is teaching, not research. A common lament is that some colleges just aren't teaching enough good old-time philosophy.

Graduates of these facilities may do well on national boards, may have high pass rates on licensing exams, and may enthusiastically support their alma maters. Nonetheless, they are in many ways victims of a system with little appreciation of scholarship. After 16 years of publication, the profession's leading science journal, JMPT, is still ignored by 90 percent of the profession, while trade journals actively solicit anecdotes and testimonials. Apparently, few see anything wrong with this. The profession, as a whole, has no regular contact with and little exposure to scholarship, and no perceived need for such. Why should we? After all, we're doctors; we learned what we need to know in chiropractic college. Professional conferences and conventions still substitute "educational programs" for scientific paper sessions, and often feature "back to the basics" lectures that fail to

advance scholarly appreciation among attendees. The static instructional model that begins in our schools then permeates the field and our faculties, thereby reinforcing a "wonders of chiropractic" self-delusion that locks successive generations into no growth, no change. The consequent inability of many of our doctors to interact with the wider health science community is perceived either in terms of persecution, or the inability of other professionals to "get the big idea." Our lack of concern about academic affairs perpetuates a culture gap between DCs and all others.

What say you, chiropractors? Are these just the ravings of a point-headed doctor (PhD) and ivory-tower dweller who just doesn't understand that "chiropractic works, that's what counts." Or does any of the above ring true? Are marketing issues more important than the educational and intellectual fabric of chiropractic? Will innate take care of these problems? Are academic affairs an esoteric province for instructional coordinators, or ought they be the concern of the entire chiropractic profession? Who will take the initiative at the schools and in the field?

Joseph C. Keating Jr., Ph.D.
Portland, Oregon

JUNE 1993