

Introduction

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Having grown up in a chiropractic family, I have been privileged to observe the profession's development over nearly half its existence, and for more than half that time as a full participant. It has been exciting to watch chiropractic grow out of persecuted marginality to become a vigorous mainstream profession, and extremely rewarding to be part of that process. The advancement and legitimization of chiropractic has been matched by developments in its literature, the emergence of peer-reviewed, primary-source journals coinciding with the latter stages of legitimation and an increasing emphasis on research.

By 1990 there were several of these journals and in May of that year, with the support of the Foundation for Chiropractic Education and Research, their editors formed the Chiropractic Research Journal Editors' Council. Since then, CRJEC has met annually to discuss current issues in chiropractic and biomedical publishing and to set standards and policies. The primary purpose of these standards is to ensure that material published in member journals is well-researched, coherently presented, and adequately supported by data and references. Other concerns council has addressed in forming its policies include access to the chiropractic literature through databases, conflicts of interest, research ethics, advertising ethics, and fraudulent publication. CRJEC publishes a report of each meeting in the *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics*.¹⁻³

The members of CRJEC, listed at the end of this article, are bound by Council policies, however editors of other publications which also represent the chiropractic profession are not. It has become a matter of considerable concern that there is material still being published in some chiropractic journals, trade magazines, and tabloids which, in effect, compromises the profession's credibility. While it is outside the scope of CRJEC to be a watchdog in this regard, it is Council's aim to offer assistance and leadership. With this in mind, the authors of the following report, which was tabled for discussion at the 1993 meeting of CRJEC, have given permission for it to be published in *Dynamic Chiropractic*.

Discussion Paper by Committee on Ethics and Advertising Standards

By Editors Russell W. Gibbons, Thomas Bergman, John Grostic

The 1992 third annual meeting of the Chiropractic Research Journal Editors' Council (CRJEC) in Chicago authorized the formation of a Committee on Ethics and Advertising Standards and asked that a preliminary report be made for CRJEC's 1993 meeting.

CRJEC expressed concerns about "the use and type of advertising that appears in the chiropractic literature" and said that chiropractors "must realize that the integrity of the profession is at risk when inappropriate advertising and/or classifieds appear in its professional journals."

In presenting these preliminary points as a discussion paper, members of the committee are aware

that this is a sensitive issue among those who are involved in editing, production, publication, and marketing to and for the chiropractic profession.

Chiropractic does not enjoy the resources of the drug and pharmaceutical industry in the form of seemingly endless advertising revenues supportive of the hundreds of medical journals in North America. Chiropractic is restricted to x-ray and nutritional supplement advertising, with a smaller percentage from the physical therapy modalities.

An examination of the so-called "trade" publications or tabloid newspapers marketed to the chiropractors reveals a large-consumption advertising by "practice building" consultants and companies. Without any subjective commentary from this committee, it is apparent that this has been a continued source of negative external public relations by those medical "chiropractic watchers" who seek to discredit trends within the profession.

The discovery process of the Wilk case by George McAndrews and other counsel for the profession amassed a huge body of literature which brought little credit to many of the journals and publications within chiropractic in the period which encompassed the litigation.

Other groups, including the ACA, have sought to address the ethical issues involved in "practice building," further compounded in recent years by court decisions which have removed most restrictions on health providers who seek to advertise in the telephone directory business or yellow pages. It is not the intention of this committee to offer further observations in this area, other than to again quote Counsel McAndrews, who warned last year "of the enormous damage to the reputation of the profession and its members that many such unsubstantiated ads do."

It only seems logical that if CRJEC is committed to the upgrading and professional advancement of journals and serials directed toward the chiropractic profession, that it also offer suggestions or guidelines for ethics and advertising. Accordingly, the following areas of concern are submitted for further discussion and comments by editors and publishers of journals and trade publications directed toward chiropractic:

1. Unsubstantiated Claims. Publishers (with consultation of editors qualified to make evaluations) should review copy which suggests that any particular technique or modality makes other therapeutic approaches "unnecessary" or not "cost effective." The use of materials which suggest "exclusive" access for those practitioners utilizing the service, and offering therapy in areas not within the chiropractic guidelines (i.e., cancer, AIDS, etc.) should be areas of concern for publishers.
2. The "Money" and Patient Volume Syndromes. Advertising copy which portrays money should be especially offensive to any professional publications (the frequency of such ads is excessive in the trade publications) as are ads which equate "successful" practices with the number of patients seen daily/weekly. This involves another internal practice procedural discussion, but again becoming copy utilized by those seeking to discredit the profession.
3. Classified. Many otherwise presentable journals may accept borderline advertising, such as those for questionable degrees (see below). Classified and display classified advertising which seeks to bring the practitioner into marginal practice areas (dare we suggest colonics?) as well as various "investment opportunities," whose copy might not be acceptable in other professional journals, might well be screened.

4. Easy and Quick Degrees. If public perception about chiropractic education is still uninformed, it may be that some of its journals and publications accept, without question, advertising from institutions designated as "unaccredited," which in previous times would be dubbed "diploma mills." Today any number of journals and trade newspapers in the profession run such ads, offering advanced degrees for nonresident study and "life experience," as well as for degrees in homeopathy, naturopathy, and nutrition. Such advertising recalls the difficult evolution of chiropractic through its own diploma mill era, and has no place in its literature today. It is still a practice for some "technique" and modality organizations to offer "fellowships" or "diplomates" of equally questionable value. Additionally, it diminishes the value of every legitimate advanced degree achieved by chiropractors.

5. Sex Exploitation. It is sad that a profession with such a pioneer history of equity in schooling and practice should, as it approaches its centennial, have even minor instances of sex exploitation. Those who read the literature are aware of advertisers (usually sophisticated copy produced by agencies) who use the female body in ways which have little or no relationship to the product or modality. This is an editorial problem on occasion as well, and is a regular feature of one magazine which claims a large chiropractic audience. A profession which now has one in five students who are women, with appropriate association, college, and research achievements, and a growing number of women practitioners, should not tolerate such vestiges of sexism.

There are many other areas which this committee could present for discussion, and it will hopefully generate such commentary and additions. That is the purpose of this initial draft, and we welcome the contributions of all CRJEC editors and associates within the profession.

References (to Introduction)

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