

Clinton's Health Plan -- A Candid Observation

Chester Wilk, DC

The Clinton plan is out and I must confess that I am thoroughly flabbergasted to see that all of these presumably intelligent people, in attempting to solve the health care crisis, are not even mentioning the "C" word as one of the solutions. Of course, the "C" word is chiropractic.

If I can put it very graphically and candidly, it almost appears as though they are sitting on their brains. How can they not recognize all of the magnificent studies from all of these very credible sources showing conclusively that chiropractic health care is clearly superior to medicine within its realm? What is wrong? Let's review some of the obvious facts.

We have state workers' compensation records showing that chiropractic is blowing the competition away in compensation costs, effectiveness and safety.

- In Utah, we outperformed the medics by 1,000 percent.
- The Oregon and California studies give chiropractic a two to one superiority. These are no small advantages by any standard.
- The Silverman Report reveals how 12 out of 12 previously medically diagnosed disc cases were corrected through chiropractic care saving the largest HMO in the southeastern United States hundreds of thousands of dollars.
- In Chicago, an orthopedic hospital ward was sending patients home well seven to nine days sooner than another hospital which was not using chiropractic care.

Chiropractic is now proved to be more scientifically based than medicine within its realm, and studies are showing that the medical approach to these same back problems are often questionable and even dangerous.

- In Saskatchewan, Canada, a joint chiropractic/medical project at a major university medical center shows that in one test group of 171 chronic back pain patients, medically unresponsive for seven years, 87 percent were corrected chiropractically within two to three weeks; they were evaluated one year later and remained pain free.
- A major Italian government study involving 22 medical clinics with independent PhDs from leading universities evaluated chiropractic care on over 17,000 patients and concluded that chiropractic reduced hospitalization by 87.8 percent and work loss by 75.6 percent.
- We have a major 10 year government study from Great Britain utilizing a solid scientifically

established controlled clinical study showing chiropractic has a two to one advantage over medicine within its realm of therapy.

- And most of us have heard of the New Zealand report: hundreds of the world's leading authorities in health care gave glowing testimonials of the safety and effectiveness of chiropractic.

And the list goes on, growing with every passing month. A study complete this August echoes the same message.

- The government of Ontario, Canada, burdened with a financial crisis caused by its medical health care program, commissioned a study on chiropractic, commonly referred to as the Manga Report. (Editor's note: see "Manga Report from Canada Extols Benefits of Chiropractic" in Oct. 8th issue.) Utilizing some world-class economists, it analyzed all of the available clinical studies, statistics, and other pertinent data, and concluded that chiropractic was overwhelmingly "superior" to medicine in the care of low back pain. Its conclusions were based on what the study called an "overwhelming body of evidence" that within its realm, chiropractic was much more therapeutically effective, costeffective, safer, more scientifically-based, and had a much higher level of patient satisfaction than medical care.

The study cautioned the Ontario government against many of the "untested, questionable, or harmful" medical treatments and urged that the government encourage and prefer chiropractic care over medical care for low back pain. It further recommended that chiropractors be retained by all hospitals to act as "gatekeepers" who would direct the care of low back patients in hospitals.

Given the facts today that we have going for chiropractic care, it is not surprising that they came up with the above conclusions. They could not have come up with any other possible answers. What is surprising: that seemingly intelligent people within our government cannot -- or will not -- see the same obvious truth and are attempting to solve the crisis without mentioning chiropractic. The truth is, how can anyone in their right mind ignore it? It is mind-boggling that they cannot see the obvious truth. So what is the problem? Let's look deeper into the situation.

The issues are not that difficult to understand. They don't need a degree in economics, medicine, or chiropractic to recognize the obvious truth. All they need is some plain common horse sense and some simple logic.

Could it be that they our government leaders are so incredibly incompetent in researching the facts? Or is it possible that we chiropractors are not communicating the facts well enough to where these key people understand them? Or is it a combination of the two?

I have heard some doctors suggest that maybe some people in government were "paid off," but that is not a reasonable theory. I only mention it here because I have heard it expressed many times and I don't believe it can be a factor.

Another idea that has been promulgated is that people are heavily programmed to where they cannot see the truth even though it literally hits them over the head. I think this theory makes a lot of sense, except that it simply means that we must communicate our message more efficiently and assertively so that we can "deprogram" these people into understanding health care in proper perspective. We are the only ones who can do it since no one else really cares. It's not in anyone else's interest. The only benefactors are chiropractors and their patients.

There is another factor which has bothered me for the last couple of years, and when I initially protested it, it only served to anger some chiropractors and nothing was accomplished. However, I learned many years ago that you cannot accomplish anything meaningful in life if you simply try to make everybody happy. Sometimes you have to say what has to be said.

Two years ago I attended the joint ACA/ICA Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. I urged our leadership to take a strong assertive approach with the media and talk about these magnificent studies on Washington radio, television, and the press. Incredibly, the prevailing attitude was, "Don't make waves" and just quietly attend the legislative conference, get some briefing, and then visit your legislators' offices. The "expert" advice was that appearing on radio and TV in Washington with this information was "knee jerk fluff and making news when there is no news." I strongly disagree.

What does it take to make news? Must the entire sky fall down on this health care field? We have a powerful story to tell yet precious few people know the facts. And to discourage the dissemination of these facts is unconscionable.

I certainly support visiting the legislators with the facts but what can you say in the privacy of their offices that you can't also say on radio, TV, and to the press and simultaneously reach hundreds of thousands of people besides? Furthermore, legislators and their staffs listen to talk radio shows to keep up with the latest news.

I'm not advocating carrying on in the media and making fools of ourselves like some other radical groups. What I suggest is that we go to these talk shows as concerned, responsible, and compassionate doctors eager to see honest, well balanced, safe, and effective health care.

I took our leaders' advice and went to the House Office Building and walked down the hallways and visited several congressmen's offices. I stumbled upon the office of Congressman Fortney "Pete" Stark, who just happened to be the keynote speaker at the ACA/ICA Legislative Conference that day. As a ranking member of the House Ways and Means committee he is a critical legislator to be made aware of the facts about chiropractic, and due to these factors he was a good choice to have as a keynote speaker.

I stepped into his office, introduced myself, and was immediately escorted to Bill Vaughn, who was Congressman Stark's chief legislative aide and advisor on health care matters. He was very receptive and eager to help his constituents receive appropriate chiropractic care.

I mentioned the Silverman Report, the Italian study, the David Cassidy/Kirkaldy-Willis study and how 87 percent of a group of chronic, seven year pain sufferers found quick and permanent relief within three weeks of chiropractic care. I mentioned the Dr. Per Freitag study which sent patients home well seven to nine days sooner than with medical care, among other studies. He was astonished and completely taken aback. He couldn't believe it.

Bill Vaughn's reaction was that these are amazing facts and why hasn't anyone from the chiropractic leadership given him these facts? He asked how he could help us if we don't give him the facts with which to make our case? I was speechless. What could I say? All I could say was that I cannot speak for our leaders except that their experts were viewing the presentation of these facts and making news when they are not news. I was ashamed, embarrassed and disgusted by the abysmal lack of awareness by one of the most important legislators who should have known these facts.

And so could it be that the legislators in Washington are not that incompetent? Could it be that we

are listening to the wrong "expert" advice?

I realize that making these candid observations will not endear me to some of our leadership but we haven't been named in the Clinton Plan. It appears as though chiropractic is a nonentity.

If you are not a member of a national organization then this should serve as a strong incentive to join now and do something about it. Some of our leaders have been misguided but at least they are trying their best which no one should fault. We need to all become involved in this crisis and correct it.

We have the greatest truth in the world concerning health care yet too few people know anything about it. We treat only seven percent of the population which is a tragic disgrace. We need to change attitudes in our nation but the change must first begin from within our profession! We need to banish any thoughts that what we have to say is not newsworthy. It is extremely vital and newsworthy and since few people know about it is news -- big time news!

Sixteen years ago I infuriated many chiropractic leaders at that time by taking a strong position that we must sue the AMA. Some of our paid "experts" at that time advised against it and many chiropractic leaders felt that since we paid our experts we should listen to them. Some these experts are gone but we still have to live with their mistakes. Let's not make the same mistakes now. The suit was only half the battle. Things are far better but we should have learned by now that the suit was not a utopia to cure all ills. The other half of the battle is to educate an ignorant, misguided, and medically programmed society and our legislators. I hope that my constructive comments are accepted in the spirit that they are given because survival of rational health care is on the line -- and chiropractic can make the difference.

Chester Wilk, DC
Chicago, Illinois

NOVEMBER 1993