

Separate but Equal?

WOULD SOMEONE PLEASE EXPLAIN?

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Having grown up in a chiropractic family (both my father and grandfather were chiropractors), there are many issues within the profession that are easy to understand. The rich heritage that has been handed down to me allows both my heart and my head to fully appreciate and espouse all that chiropractic stands for. The ability to understand the differences in philosophy between a more conservative chiropractor and a more liberal practitioner are not hard to understand. Their relative values and advantages speak for themselves.

Although it is not in the best interest of the chiropractic profession, one can even appreciate why there might be the perceived need to have separate organizations representing the interests of different philosophical points of view. But we all look for the day when nationally and on a statewide basis, the chiropractic profession speaks with one voice through one organization that includes all philosophies.

Dismissing the problems of politics and philosophy for a moment, we can turn to science. Looking specifically at chiropractic research, we see no lines of division, only the established methodologies that are employed by all researchers throughout the world: methodologies that have, and will continue to demonstrate the effectiveness, and in many cases superiority, of chiropractic care.

A very critical ingredient in demonstrating the effectiveness of chiropractic treatment is to show that chiropractors throughout the country (and even the world) uphold the same quality of care to their patients. This doesn't translate into using the same techniques or even holding the same philosophy. It is simply the concept that a patient can be assured of the same high standard of chiropractic care regardless of which chiropractor (holding which philosophy, using which technique, belonging to which association, graduating from which chiropractic college, etc.) that patient chooses to see.

If we thought about this in terms of standards of practice for attorneys, we would hope that the standards that are upheld by the bar association for criminal lawyers would be the same as those required of personal injury attorneys. Some may argue whether this is the case, but you can rest assured that the legal profession does not have two different legal practice guidelines for two different specialties.

The proceedings from the Mercy Center Conference are about to be presented to the chiropractic profession. Most of the sponsoring organizations are already reviewing the document to consider if they will endorse its practice guidelines. A number of states have already received copies to use in their response for practice guidelines demanded by the government agencies within their particular state. Chiropractors in Canada and Australia are in the process of using this document as part of the formulation of their own practice guidelines in response to pressures from their respective national governments.

In the next month or so you, and every other chiropractor in the United States, will have a chance to comment on these guidelines as part of the process of development. Your comments will in turn

be used to enhance the guidelines when they are reviewed by a new commission at a latter date. This is the normal process of developing practice guidelines for a health care profession. It is a very active, responsive, and dynamic event.

Thus far, there has been little or no criticism of the process used to generate these guidelines. Almost profession-wide, there has been agreement as to the fairness of the process, the representation of the profession through the 35 members of the conference and the ultimate ability of these proceedings to accurately reflect the quality of chiropractic care.

Now, suddenly, there is a small group of chiropractors who insist on creating their own standards. In unabashed duplication the "Wyndham Conference" has been announced as "A conference for the establishment of straight standards of practice and quality assurance." In a press release, the creators of this conference announce a conference that almost perfectly copies the consensus process, committee structure, and guidelines development of the Mercy Center Conference. Why?

With such well-known leaders of the profession (not only members of the Mercy Center Conference, but some acting as members of the steering committee and as committee captains) such as: Ralph Boone, D.C., Ph.D., president of Southern California College and president of the Straight Chiropractic Academic Standards Association (SCASA); Gerard Clum, D.C., president of Life College West and president of the Association of Chiropractic Colleges; R. James Gregg, D.C., president of the International Chiropractors Association (ICA); Donald Kern, D.C., president of Palmer College; Charles "Skip" Lantz, D.C., Ph.D., Life College West research director; Michael Pedigo, D.C., ICA past president; William Remling, D.C., chairman of the New York Chiropractic Council; and Monica Smith, D.C. You can be well assured that the "straight" portion of the profession was well-served by the Mercy Center Conference Guidelines. So why another set of guidelines?

Some might suggest that the answer to the question can be found in those who have organized the duplicate conference: the World Chiropractic Alliance (not a true association due to the fact that the members are prohibited from voting for the officers, how the Alliance's money is spent or any actions the Alliance may take) and SCASA (a second accrediting agency whose existence remains doubtful). At one time it was hoped that these two organizations would find a way to join the rest of the profession, but this new attempt at "separatist chiropractic" merely underscores their undying efforts to act independently of the other 96% of the profession.

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