

Chiropractic Care Reaches behind Bars in Bogota

Gregory White, DC

As our jet touched down in the huge city of Bogota, Colombia, South America, we were somewhat apprehensive. This was the first time either Dr. Eric Jackson or myself had given chiropractic adjustments behind bars. As far as we know, it was the first time that chiropractors had been into the prisons there.

In November 1991, Prison Fellowship invited us, through the Christian Chiropractors Association, to provide chiropractic treatment for the inmates in three of Bogota's major prisons.

Upon entering each prison, the security guards checked everything: our person, cameras, adjusting tables including the padding, even our lunches. These were maximum security prisons for both men and women.

As we interacted with the prisoners, there was such a positive reception and good response, we had to keep reminding ourselves that these people were in there for very serious crimes. We saw a great deal of stress-related problems as a result of prison life. There were the typical musculoskeletal syndromes, plus people with decades of neck and back trouble due to intense manual labor. Women who had back pain for years thinking it was from an organic problem, soon discovered it to be of biomechanical origin. In all three prisons we adjusted people with subluxated wrists, elbows, and knees.

In the women's prison, which had less rigid security measures, we treated the guards, the prisoners, and even the administrative staff, all in the same room together. There were long line-ups from the time we arrived until we left. Prisoners would be laughing and joking with guards as they heard their joints crack, and the ambiance grew from fun, to encouragement and hope.

On the second day, after seeing what we were doing, the chief medical officer and several other doctors came in for adjustments for mainly biomechanical problems of the spine. It was interesting to note that they were suffering from tension similar to what we find in practice in North America. Comparatively, the prisoners, on the whole, seemed much more relaxed. All of the prison's medical personnel came back on the last day, along with the director and his assistant, for more treatments.

Another highlight of our trip occurred later that week when our missionary host was asked if we would go to the Department of the Ministry of Justice. Word had reached the justice minister of the spirit of togetherness and sense of unity we had created at the prison, and he wanted us to go and accomplish the same thing for his staff.

Although our visit to the first prison was positive, a warm and friendly reception, the inmates in the second two maximum security prisons were far more difficult to relate to. They were sullen and depressed. Many of their problems were trauma-related from knife wounds and gun shots. It was in one of these prisons that we adjusted a young man who had assassinated the minister of justice five years previously.

We saw between 80 and 100 people per day from about 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. Through the contacts made by our host, we also treated people from the missionary community and Colombian friends up until 10:30 some nights, with a total of approximately 150 treatments on those days.

During our two weeks in Colombia, we treated approximately 600 people. Sometimes we are asked, "What is the value of a short-term mission like that? What can be accomplished in such a short time?" We saw health changes take place at such a rapid rate, even we were amazed. One missionary was having such pain in her shoulder that her medical doctor was prepared to perform surgery. There was nerve root compression and acute tendinitis in the rotary cuff. Two adjustments later, Dr. Jackson said, "I saw a change that would normally take six weeks at home." By the time we left, her shoulder problem was completely cleared up. This chiropractic care saved her from an unnecessary and expensive medical leave, and an extensive rehabilitation and recovery period.

Another missionary with an acute C5, six-facet syndrome was unable to lift her arm. She was greatly relieved after two adjustments. Carlos, a former government chauffeur and bodyguard, had low back pain for 10 years. He reports that after five adjustments he has had no further trouble with his back.

We have found that when we go on a short-term mission trip, our effectiveness goes beyond our fondest dreams. What a wonderful way to spend a vacation!

Both Drs. John W. Hall and Eric Jackson practice in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada and are members of the Christian Chiropractors of Canada. Dr. Hall is a veteran missionary DC, having served in Vietnam and at the head waters of the Amazon River in Ecuador, South America.

Greg White, D.C.
Missions' Chairman

Christian Chiropractors Association

Inquiries may be directed to:

Christian Chiropractors of Canada
276 Plains Road
Burlington, Ontario L7T 2C6
Canada
(416) 634-9535

Christian Chiropractors Association
3200 S. Lemay
Ft. Collins, Colorado 80525
1-800-999-1970

Australian Christian Chiropractors Association
433 Buckley Street
Essendon, 3040
Australia, Victoria
(03) 337-9868

British Christian Chiropractors Society
133 Chorley Road
Walton Le Dale
Preston, PR5-4JR
England, UK
011-44-772-696-611

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