

Chiropractic Goes Hollywood

Steve Kelly, managing editor

Chiropractic, like any profession, gets both good and bad portrayals in the media. Is it fair to say that the media reflects the general opinions of the public? The McLean County (Illinois) survey (see February 1, 1991 issue of "DC") revealed that of 19 professions surveyed by the public, chiropractic ranked 18th overall, next to last.

So it is hardly surprising when we hear of negative media coverage of chiropractic. DCs are quick to phone us, or send letters alerting us to these negative portrayals. Ronald Maugeri, D.C. and Michael Fanelli, D.C. of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania were the first to inform us of the now infamous "Seinfeld" episode, an NBC sitcom that aired January 23.

We missed the show (no remote control punching couch potatoes we) but the plot is this: The star, Jerry Seinfeld, has a friend who is experiencing lower back pain. Jerry suggests that he go to his personal chiropractor. Good PR for chiropractic. The friend is not open to the idea, saying lines like, "Doctors, they call them (chiropractors) doctors?" Bad PR for chiropractic. Despite his anti-chiropractic stance, Jerry's friend reluctantly agrees to go to the chiropractor.

Jerry's friend sees the chiropractor (a two minute examination and treatment) and is handed a bill, at which point he grumbles, "\$75 and all he did was push and poke." He refuses to pay the full bill, deigning instead to only pay half. Jerry is embarrassed with his friend's parsimony, and secretly pays the other half of the bill. When learning of Jerry's subterfuge, he says, "Why did you do that? Don't you know it's all a sham."

"Sham," when used to describe chiropractic care is a word that chiropractors like about as much as Westerners revere the name Saddam Hussein. Drs. Maugeri and Fanelli were appalled at the labeling of chiropractic as a "sham" and told NBC in their letter that it was "an unfair and ignorant representation of our profession." The DCs pointed out that this misrepresentation was a "defamation of chiropractic that was disseminated to millions of households." They asked NBC to resolve the matter by a public apology during prime time television, and to portray chiropractic in a positive manner in a subsequent program.

David Shingler, director of communications for the ACA told "DC" that they have received so many letters and phone calls protesting this "Seinfeld" episode that they have formulated a response to be printed in the ACA's Journal of Chiropractic. Mr. Shingler advises, "First, decide whether you consider the glass half empty or half full. Has a sufficiently positive step been taken with the obviously positive reference to chiropractic? This, of course, would dictate that we take in stride the sidekick's negative comments."

David Shingler recommends that we must make our displeasure known to NBC and Castle Rock (Rob Reiner's company that produces "Seinfeld") but to "Consider the tone of your letter (or phone call) carefully ... responses that are so angry in tone ... are not taken seriously, just counted. Get taken seriously. Make a good point and ask for a rational response."

Margalit Grunberger, director of public and media relations for the ICA says she fielded 40-50

phone calls over the "Seinfeld" episode. From her experience in the entertainment industry, she believes that Castle Rock is a responsible company that may be open to airing a future show that is more positive towards chiropractic, assuming that enough response is directed towards them, and in a diplomatic way.

That the subject of chiropractic is part of a sitcom, is evidence of the increased public awareness of the profession. The negative portrayal of the friend towards chiropractic is evidence that chiropractic still has a long way to go to reverse the attitudes and misconceptions that cloud so many minds. Chiropractic will survive the "Seinfeld" episode and other negative media portrayals; but chiropractic's public image needs your help. With 52,317 DCs worldwide, 8,219 students of chiropractic, and 4,421 chiropractic suppliers, chiropractic can be a forceful voice if enough DCs, students of chiropractic, and friends of the profession respond to such negative media coverage, and -- if we express ourselves wisely.

Take up your pen, turn on your word processor, or pick up the phone, and express yourself. Chiropractic can't afford to be part of the silent majority.

NBC Audience Services
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10112
Telephone: (212) 664-4444

Castle Rock Entertainment Co.
"Seinfeld" Andy Cheinman, Larry
Davis, George Shapiro, Producers
345 N. Maple
Beverly Hills, CA 90210
Telephone: (213) 285-2300

For future reference you may call the ICA's "Ready Response Hotline" at 1-800-423-4690, or the ACA at (703) 276-8800 whenever you hear, read, or see any negative media coverage of chiropractic.

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