

Boston TV News -- Two Views of Chiropractic

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Recently, two Boston television stations, WLVI and WBVZ, each explored chiropractic on their evening news programs, and depending upon which program you saw, gave either a scathing or glowing report. The difference between the two exemplify the strong and widely divergent opinions of chiropractic. More than ever these programs prove that each chiropractor carries the burden of representing the entire profession, and attracts attention to chiropractic that can be very negative or very positive.

Negative attention was brought on chiropractic by Dr. Paul Jondle. A WLVI reporter went "undercover," posing as a patient visiting the office of Dr. Jondle. He was armed with a briefcase containing a hidden camera. The story the reporter tells is that he was a passenger in a friend's car when there was an accident. He says that he is only there "to be checked out" and does not know if he was injured in any way (which is a statement he repeats several times to various people). The receptionist's first question was not "Are you in pain?" as you would expect but, "Do you have a lawyer and does your friend have insurance?" Before going any further she hands him insurance forms to fill out. When the reporter reaches the part on the form that says, "Describe your injury," he reiterates that he doesn't know if he is injured, he is only there "to be checked out." The receptionist tells him to write down that he injured his back and neck. Obviously, this is before any kind of examination (and the receptionist had no degree in chiropractic). The "scam" had begun.

Dr. Jondle sees the reporter for approximately four minutes. The reporter again says that he is there only "to be checked out." After this "examination," Dr. Jondle recommends a battery of expensive tests including:

Electric Muscle test - \$350
Paraspinal Electromyography - \$375
Nine x-rays - Cost exceeded norm
Dr. Jondle's four minutes and
another chiropractor's exam - \$250
Total billed to insurance company \$1600.00

The reporter is told that he will have to come back the next day, Friday, and also Saturday. When the x-rays are read (by a different chiropractor than Dr. Jondle) he is told that there is evidence of recent trauma to the 5th vertebra (but, as we know, the accident is total fiction). He is told that he will need treatment, and if he is thinking of taking time off work, he should do it now. He is told that he will have to set up a month's worth of appointments for "treatment."

It turns out that Dr. Jondle visits the Malden area police station regularly to get the names of accident victims. And he is on the advisory board of the Vertebral Subluxation Research Institute (VSRI), which offers \$50 to people if they will come in and take tests for "research." These tests usually uncover some problem (conveniently) that requires "treatment," whether the person has a problem or not.

The Massachusetts Chiropractic State Board has tangled with Dr. Jondle in the past. He has had

two incidents investigated by them, and the board is presently looking into two new complaints. Dr. Jondle would only comment to the reporter under conditions the reporter found unacceptable.

I was immediately appalled by this money-making scheme. Although the newsteam members who introduce the piece make a point of saying that it is a "small group of chiropractors gouging insurance companies," this point would probably get lost in the shuffle for a layperson like myself. The news report is unrelentingly negative, but given its focus on Dr. Jondle, this is understandable. The sad thing is that many viewers, for whom the news report is their first contact with the profession, may have decided that all chiropractors are frauds and charlatans due to Dr. Jondle's unrepentant selfishness.

It is a relief that the other piece on chiropractic, broadcast on a different Boston station several nights later, is an informative and positive look at the profession. It is a profile of Dr. Jim Feil that is upbeat, and shows that chiropractors are fully qualified and educated health care professionals who relieve pain and prevent its reoccurrence. The profile mentions that Dr. Feil is one of 36,000 chiropractors in the United States, and that chiropractic is the third largest health care profession in the Western world (and growing rapidly). The report is excellent public relations for the chiropractic profession.

Dr. Feil explains, on camera, that chiropractors' expertise is dealing with the relationship between the nerves and the spine, demonstrating with a model of the spine. He is presented as a caring, educated professional. There are two of Dr. Feil's patients featured in the story who praise chiropractic and affirm its effectiveness. One woman who had debilitating headaches describes how Dr. Feil has helped to relieve her pain. She attests that she feels "80 to 90 percent better." Another patient is a man who had an accident years ago in which he hurt his back, and has come to Dr. Feil for maintenance treatment and exercises.

It is obvious that Dr. Feil is concerned with helping his patients, not with lining his pockets. Chiropractic needs more media coverage of people like him, i.e., the majority of the profession. I was extremely impressed by this report: even the reporters at the end of the piece remarked that, "There are a lot of alternatives out there." Hopefully, other non-chiropractors viewed the program and were impressed as well; they may be inspired to seek help from a chiropractor when they would never have considered it before.

So many people are skeptical of the profession because of chiropractors' like Paul Jondle, and yet there are far more chiropractors like Jim Feil. If chiropractic is ever going to come into its own, it is imperative to realize that the reputation of the profession rests on the shoulders of each and every chiropractor. The media is watching chiropractic emerge as the top health care profession, and the time is now to establish a good reputation. Remember that the responsibility is yours.

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