

## The Fashion Statement

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Some time ago Cosmopolitan magazine printed a terrible article about chiropractic that was filled with blatant lies. The author's job was to make chiropractors look like a bunch of uneducated glorified masseurs -- and not really glorified at that.

In rage I wrote the magazine a letter that was only partially printed (of course). The medical stooge who wrote the article answered me by calling me "Mr." and dismissed everything I wrote as being "chiropractic propaganda." Naturally they didn't print my answer to that -- it was filled with too much information that made him look like the lying jerk that he was.

The world has turned a few times since then but one of the things that stuck most in my mind was not so much the garbage that was written, as the one full-page illustration that accompanied the article. It was a cartoon of a brutish character wearing a T-shirt with a tattoo on his arm, obviously twisting the life out of a hapless victim on the table. Clearly the concept of the cartoon was to portray chiropractors as people not worthy of wearing the clothes usually associated with the healing arts.

Then there was a local news channel which decided to do a story on chiropractic in California because the California Chiropractic Association had issued a statement that our educational system was equal to that of the medical profession. After showing modern publically subsidized medical facilities, the station then took their cameras to a school that worked out of a couple of houses at the time -- complete with a broken neon sign. When in the classroom, they focused on the instructor who was wearing an open-necked shirt with rolled-up sleeves. They found a tattoo on his arm and zoomed in to impress the audience with how unprofessional we are -- and they did a pretty good job of it.

The audience was left with the impression that chiropractic was taught out of someone's kitchen by wrestlers and masseurs. So much for the value of chiropractic education.

More recently, in Vermont, I found that the CBS affiliate wouldn't put on the TV commercials for chiropractors if they wore a white jacket. The feeling was that they didn't want to "confuse" the public into believing we were the "real thing" by wearing garments associated with genuine doctors.

If all of the proceeding gets you a bit angry -- who's to blame? The answer is of course -- us. Over the earlier years we were indeed staffed with rather unsophisticated characters with less than sterling educational credits. But that was then and this is now. Now there's no excuse.

As with all the healing arts, we had to go through a period of maturation. Now we have schools filled with young men and women with excellent and continually improving educational backgrounds. The curriculum and faculties in our schools have improved significantly while the physical facilities of chiropractic colleges are on a par with many of the better medical institutions.

Still we have an unprofessional swamp we wade through every day. This swamp is of our own creation. For some reason we have a bunch of natural health doctors who feel that we must look

natural or casual in our dress. "Why should I care?" one DC told me, "I didn't want to be like the MDs anyway. After all, it's what I do after the patient gets in here that matters."

That may be, but unfortunately chiropractic is not only an art and science but a business as well and, like it or not, we have to sell or merchandise what we have. This means that like any other form of merchandise, we have to be packaged properly. The medical profession has sold the public on the fact that a "real" doctor wears a white jacket -- period.

It's my opinion that we have too many "natural" bozos in the profession. All too often I view videotapes and see photos in our texts with our doctors in shirt sleeves. And many times I've been in otherwise professional offices only to see the doctor come out in shirt sleeves or a sport shirt. And just as often I've heard the patients talk to their DCs as if they were hired hands working the back forty.

This may all be very cute and homey, but it does nothing for the image our education should project. Like too many things, we think that if MDs do it, we must do the opposite. If they use a stethoscope, we musn't. If the medical profession uses a caduceus as a symbol of healing, we can't. If they "diagnose," we shouldn't.

It's about time that we stopped giving everything away. After all, Hippocrates believed that care of the spine was extremely important in the maintenance of health and wrote long papers on the manipulation and adjustment of the vertebrae -- and yet he's been captured by medicine as the "Father" of their profession.

By the same token, let's not give professional demeanor away along with everything else. For a change we should stop being so casual and act like the professionals we're supposed to be. If we expect to see a ballerina in "Swan Lake" dressed as a swan instead of in army fatigues, the least we can do is put on the "costume" the public expects a doctor to wear -- a white jacket.

Let's examine some of the most common reasons for not being professionally attired:

1. Why should I? It won't make me any better at what I do.
2. I don't want anyone to think I'm an MD.
3. I don't want to take the time to keep a jacket clean.
4. It's too clinical and frightens children.
5. B.J. never said "white jacket."

If any of the preceeding matches the way you feel -- you're out of touch with reality. And if number 5 is the reason -- you're on another planet.

They say that if you look like a duck, walk like one and sound like one -- you are one. Let's start looking like doctors and I'll bet the public's perception of the rest will follow.

*RHT*

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