

Chiropractic in New Zealand

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New Zealand Chiropractors' Association

Legislation

Chiropractors first established practices in New Zealand in the early 1920s. Legislation was passed in 1961 in the form of a Registration Act. Chiropractors were first registered under this Act in 1962. In the late 1970s, a government commission of inquiry into chiropractic was held. The findings of this well known inquiry have been used throughout the world to help improve the position of our profession. Much to the chagrin of chiropractors in New Zealand, only two changes have occurred since the commission's report was published. One was an updated Registration Act, which was passed in 1982, while the other was the removal of a ban on referral to chiropractors, from the New Zealand Medical Association's code of ethics.

The New Zealand Chiropractors' Association

The New Zealand Chiropractors' Association (NZCA) has membership of 94 chiropractors in full-time practice (ordinary members), and 28 non-practising members (associate members). This is a healthy representation from the total number of practising chiropractors of approximately 120. It is pleasing to note that until a year, or two years ago, the number of ordinary members had stayed at around the 75 mark. Currently there are sufficient new memberships being processed for this number to pass the 100 mark by mid-June when our next Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Technical Conference will be held. There is a general feeling in the NZCA that chiropractic is gaining in strength in New Zealand.

This year the AGM and Technical Conference will be held in Auckland, the largest metropolitan area in New Zealand with a population of 800,000. A number of first class speakers from New Zealand and overseas, including Dr. Chester Wilk, will present a wide range of technical papers and political topics.

Special Projects

Over the past year the NZCA has been working on several important projects.

The largest private health insurer in New Zealand includes chiropractic benefits in only one of its two policies, and then only on medical referral. The government funded workers' compensation scheme, called the Accident Compensation Corporation, also requires medical referral for chiropractic services, as it does for any other non-medical treatment provider. Proposals to both of these third party payers have been presented, and further work on this project is expected to go on for some time.

Traditional antipathy from the medical profession is slowly being broken down by a combination of honest communication between general medical practitioners and chiropractors. The NZCA recently met with the New Zealand General Practitioners Association to discuss interprofessional

relationships. As a result of this meeting the New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) is publishing a series of articles on chiropractic, provided by the NZCA, in its newsletter. This is a landmark occurrence. It is unlikely that the publication of such material in an NZMA publication could have occurred before this time.

In early 1990 a proposal from a technical institute suggested the profession support the establishment of an undergraduate degree course. The NZCA considered the proposal carefully, and also set up a working party with deans from Massey University to consider the feasibility of a course at that university. The proposal has great potential, as New Zealand has a low ratio of chiropractors in relation to the population. A viable course graduating 20-25 chiropractors per year would take 20 years to reach a similar ratio as Australia currently has. Unfortunately New Zealand is suffering from an economic crisis, and funding for tertiary education has been severely restricted. This will almost certainly mean a delay in development of this proposal.

Institute for Chiropractic Studies

This institute was set up in 1990 as a charitable trust. It is based in Palmerston North, and is negotiating with Massey University to build a research and administrative building on campus.

The aims and objectives of the institute are to advance the philosophy, science, art, and practice of chiropractic throughout the world, without the requirements or restraints usually encountered with chiropractic boards, associations, or chiropractic colleges.

Research into digital image processing of functional videofluoroscopic examinations is already well advanced. Further research into the neurological aspect of chiropractic is being planned.

Finally I would like to mention a research project being done at the Auckland University Medical School's physiology department. Dr. Bernadette Murphy, a Canadian national and graduate of CMCC, is working on a masters thesis that is studying the effect of chiropractic manipulation on the Hoffman reflex. Bernadette joins in NZCA branch activities; we are pleased to have her in New Zealand.

Chiropractic in New Zealand is therefore in good heart. Public relations with health professions and the general public are improving. Chiropractic research is being carried out in several centers, and education initiatives with major potential are being considered. While our market share is under threat, as it is in most countries, I am confident the chiropractic profession in New Zealand is ready to meet the challenges of the future.

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