

William Meeker, D.C., M.P.H.

ANTICIPATING THE FALL SYMPOSIUM ON BACK PAIN

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With keen foresight, the executive director of the American Back Society (ABS), Aubrey A. Swartz, M.D., working with a board of directors of physicians and surgeons that include Scott Haldeman, M.D., Ph.D., D.C., and William C. Meeker, D.C., M.P.H., (as well as yours truly), has planned an interdisciplinary conference that looks good to us, and, we hope, to you. The spring meeting in Toronto was an enormous success, in part because it integrated a strong chiropractic component. This meeting should be equally successful.

From what I have observed, chiropractors who attend ABS symposia divide their participation between presentations by chiropractors and those by medical and surgical specialists. The December meeting in San Francisco is designed to offer benefits from both kinds of participation.

The chiropractic presentations promise to be outstanding. We are looking forward to plenary sessions in which Dr. Haldeman will discuss the current status of the functional and palpatory evaluation of the spine, and Dr. Terry R. Yochum, chiropractic radiologist, will lecture on selected complex issues in reading x-rays. In addition, Drs. Craig Liebenson and Dennis Morgan will do a workshop on how one can provide basic rehabilitative training and functional restoration in a small private office setting. Dr. Robert D. Mootz will direct a workshop on the issues that face chiropractors who work in various interprofessional settings, including hospitals, HMOs, and group practice arrangements. He will be joined by Dr. Yokum, Dr. Patrick D. McBroom, a rheumatologist, and Lynn Portnoy, D.C., M.D., currently house officer in a major San Francisco medical center. For those who want to know more about recent progress in the development of chiropractic practice guidelines and standards of care, Dr. Meeker will conduct a Saturday instructional course in collaboration with Drs. Craig Liebenson, Dale Nansel, Joseph Keating, and Robert D. Mootz.

One of the aims of the ABS is to bring professionals together based on their shared involvement in the diagnosis and treatment of spinal disorders. No two professions have more in common from an historical point of view -- perhaps less so in their current status -- than chiropractors and osteopaths. Two prominent osteopathic physicians are included as plenary session speakers: Dr. Philip E. Greenman will discuss exercise principles for use in treating the failed low back syndrome, followed by a workshop on this important problem, in which Dr. Greenman will be joined by John C. Glover, M.S., D.O.

In the past, chiropractic participants have highly evaluated some of the physical therapy speakers. One who always gets high marks is Robin McKenzie from New Zealand. On Wednesday, with an orthopedic surgeon, an osteopath, and a chiropractor (Dr. Gary A. Jacob), Mr. McKenzie will conduct a presymposium course. On Thursday and Friday he speaks in the plenary sessions, and on those days he will also conduct workshops.

Of the many medical and surgical opportunities, one of the most interesting may well be the Wednesday morning presymposium courses to be directed by Kenneth I. Light, M.D. Dr. Light, a spine surgeon, will introduce participants to the experience of the new interdisciplinary, hospital-based San Francisco Spine Center. His faculty for this course will include other medical and

surgical specialists, physical therapists well known as leaders in their profession (including Mr. William Matmiller), and chiropractors (Drs. William Meeker and Matthew Rosenstein).

My own contribution to the program should not be high up on your list of priorities in comparison with the many offerings that will be directly valuable to you the following Monday morning when you begin your next week of seeing patients. However, if you are there Wednesday evening with nothing more pressing to do before the first plenary session the next morning, consider joining my son Scott (a rheumatologist) and me for a cup of coffee with a fancy pastry and a presentation that I guarantee will be the one your friends and colleagues will be asking about when you return home.

Last summer, as members of the Mills College-University of Wisconsin field expedition to Brazil, we documented extraordinary methods practiced by folk-healer renegades of the paranormal. A man with a fourth grade education is one example among the eight healers we studied. We videotaped him as he went into a trance to be possessed by the spirit of Dr. Fritz, a German physician who died during World War I. You will see him treat a man whom we examined both before and after. This patient, a 76-year-old retired gentleman suffering from mild to moderate recurrent low back pain responsive to chiropractic care, came to this healing center because he had recently moved to this town and had not found a new chiropractor.

To our astonishment, we watched as "Dr. Fritz," using no anesthetic and being totally indifferent to sterile technique, took a surgeon's scalpel to cut a three centimeter incision over the spinous processes of the lower thoracic vertebrae. With that incision as an insertion point, he then brutally forced the blunt ends of an eight-inch forceps up the spine subcutaneously until only the handles were visible; that for a patient who responds well to chiropractic adjusting.

We will also show some other patients who were treated by means of an exotic form of acupuncture in which "Dr. Fritz" plays tic-tac-toe on the patient's back with hypodermic needles.

Just as astonishing, and quite unexpected, was our documentation of spiritist chiropractic. "Dr. Fritz" performed spinal adjustments in front of our cameras that are guaranteed to make you wince. Our purpose, however, is not sensationalism as such. There are many folk-healers such as "Dr. Fritz" in Brazil; it is essential that we know what they treat and how their fame can reach patients in your own office, and tempt them to abandon scientific care for the promise of a miraculous cure.

I have barely touched upon the range and depth of what we hope you will find of value in the program that is planned for this Fall Symposium on Back Pain.

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Editor's Note:

If you would like more information about the American Back Society or want a copy of the program,, phone (415) 536-9929 or write Dr. Robert Anderson, American Back Society, 2647 East 14th Street, Suite 401, Oakland, California 94601

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