

"Professionism" in Our Midst

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I would like to take a bit of a departure from my normal commentary on myofascial pain syndromes and related locomotor system dysfunction to discuss a topic that has been on my mind a great deal lately, and on a lot of your minds, I'm learning: the way in which we as chiropractic physicians are viewed and treated by society in general and by other health care professionals in particular; and also what it is that we are going to do about it.

You see, we as a profession are not held in very high regard by these groups of people, and much of it is due to ignorance, prejudice, AMA propaganda, economic threat, and fear of the unknown. In private practice, I see this every day in my dealings with MDs, especially. Many never acknowledge when I refer them a patient, and even if I call their office to inquire about a patient I have sent to them, I frequently never receive a return phone call. Non-MD health practitioners such as physical therapists and osteopaths, for the most part, treat us with the same contempt and disrespect that MDs do. We all hear the comments of lay people about chiropractors: "I would never go to one of you bone crushers, you hurt people," "you're not really doctors," "you make people keep coming back forever," and on and on.

It is time that we, as a profession, look at all this and see it exactly for what it is. I call it professionism -- the health care equivalent to racism. In recent years our society has become increasingly aware of the unfair ways in which certain segments are viewed and treated -- blacks, women, the homeless, gays, native Americans, and many injustices have been exposed. We live in a time in which society in general is demanding that everyone be treated with the respect that they deserve. Never in the history of our profession has the atmosphere in this country been more ideal for us to create a movement toward public exposure of the professionism that runs rampant. But we must approach it in the same ways that these other minority groups have, by drawing on the public's natural desire to see that people are treated fairly.

This black civil rights movement is an excellent example of how effective a group of people can be at keeping their cause before the public's eye. Whenever an open display of racism is exposed, black leaders are immediately up in arms about it, publicly, not just by writing or speaking to the perpetrator. This makes people aware of what is going on. Leaders in the black community are always quick to let people know which political candidates appear to be supportive of their causes. Black individuals who have reached a level of notoriety (Spike Lee comes immediately to mind) have used their position to expose the racial prejudice that is commonly seen in our country.

Many cities have gay pride marches. Women have groups like NOW. Individuals within these groups are continually keeping the awareness before the public that anti-gay sentiment and sexism are things that will not be tolerated; and people have responded.

We may not choose to have chiropractic pride marches in major cities, but we can learn a great deal from other groups who have had a history of being discriminated against and who have been victims of the ignorance and lack of understanding that leads to prejudice. No matter how politically powerful the AMA is, it is still the people of this country who are the ultimate decision makers, but they need to be informed and educated; and most importantly, they need to be made

aware of the injustices against the chiropractic profession that are occurring every day. The American public can't resist a small, innocent underdog that is being picked on by a bully.

I feel very fortunate to know many MDs and other health care professionals who are very open-minded about chiropractic and while they may not completely understand our work, can treat me and the other DCs they come in contact with as colleagues and as equals. These relationships have invariably been most enjoyable and fruitful for all parties involved, and most importantly, have resulted in better patient care. But there are still many more who choose to continue to hold on to the old prejudice and exhibit professionalism, and this has an impact on public perception. Only by acting as individuals and as a profession can we eliminate professionalism from our culture.

The campaign that the ACA has begun to inform people of the scientific research that is going on in our profession is a great start. Writing letters to editors of magazines and journals that publish anti-chiropractic articles, informing the national associations of professionalism that is exhibited in any media, calling attention to anti-chiropractic discrimination in any way, is the way we change public perception and public sentiment; but we all, as individual DCs, must get involved.

If we can identify for people that professionalism is a cancer in our society just as clearly as they see racism, sexism, and so many other "isms" out there as cancers, and that everyone is affected by it through the decrease in the quality of patient care that results from it, we can start to make some great inroads in heightening our standing in society.

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