

How the Consortium Is Different

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As executive director of the (formerly "Pacific") Consortium for Chiropractic Research. I am often asked how the Consortium is different from other chiropractic research organizations such as the FCER. Implied in this question is the idea that chiropractic cannot, or should not, support more than one national research organization. After all, wouldn't funds that go to one be at the expense of the other? This reasoning is about as valid as thinking that a new chiropractor must get all his patients by taking them away from a chiropractor already in practice. Just as more DCs in practice means more awareness of chiropractic and more chiropractic patients, so legitimate new research organizations in chiropractic will mean new funding sources developed and more research accomplished.

But, the question of funding aside, there are important structural and functional differences between the Consortium and any other chiropractic research organization which has never existed. This column, which will be a regular feature of Dynamic Chiropractic in the future, will illustrate those differences with details of Consortium activities and events. For now, let's consider a couple of the more important differences.

By way of background, the (originally "Pacific") Consortium for Chiropractic Research was established in the fall of 1985 as a joint effort of the California Chiropractic Association and the six West Coast chiropractic colleges (Palmer-West, Life-West, Los Angeles, Western States, Cleveland-LA, and Pasadena). Since that time, three additional midwestern colleges (Logan, Palmer and Northwestern) have joined. Almost a dozen state associations and private organizations have also joined in the past five years, as well as hundreds of individual doctors (subscription members).

Simply put, the main objective and distinguishing feature of the Consortium is that researchers at the member colleges and organizations "consort," that is, interact with each other on a regular basis, usually one weekend every three months.

No other research organization in chiropractic has ongoing scientific interaction between members as its primary focus.

By contrast, research granting foundations typically involve the selective funding of individual studies by individual researchers. Interaction between grantees, if it occurs at all, happens formally at research conferences after the funded studies are finished. There are circumstances, however, in which communication, interaction, and cooperation between researchers and/or institutions during the research process itself is at least as important as the funding. For example, the political and economic mandate for "standards of care" which developed during the 1970's has prompted the formation of consortia of various types in all the major health care disciplines (including, of course, our own Consortium, which is devoting substantial efforts to the development of this process. More in future columns on this.) Within chiropractic research there is particular need for the scientific interaction made possible by the Consortium because individual chiropractic colleges are small, relatively isolated (even from each other), and, so far, not situated within resource-rich university environments. Of course, chiropractic researchers can still read the scientific literature; but scientific journals do not publish negative results, and, even though some redundancy is good

in scientific method, isolated researchers are liable to repeat costly, unproductive efforts if they do not have ongoing informal interaction with other workers in their field. In addition, all relevant specialty areas are usually not represented in the small numbers of faculty doing research at any one particular chiropractic college; collaboration with someone having the right expertise can be invaluable in designing, executing or analyzing a research project.

In addition to realizing that the Consortium has scientific interaction as its primary objective, it is also important to understand that the Consortium is not in the business of giving grants, but rather, of seeking them from other agencies and organizations. In that regard the consortial structure itself creates additional benefits and opportunities. For one, a consortium of colleges has considerably better chances for obtaining federal and other government grants because the research resources and fiscal stability of the group far exceeds that of any single member. A consortium of small colleges is, in fact, comparable in many ways to a university (which is, after all, also a group of colleges).

Meeting regularly and often is what makes the Consortium different and it's what makes the Consortium work; toward that end, the professional researchers of the Consortium have donated their time and skills for 20 (exhausting) weekends in the past five years. They will continue to donate their time and effort, but since external project grants generally do not cover airfare and hotel travel costs of Consortium meetings, we are requesting that anyone who understands and appreciates the importance of what the Consortium is doing can contribute toward these meeting costs by becoming an individual (subscription) member of the Consortium. Individual memberships are \$65 per year and include a subscription to the Consortium newsletter, which keeps doctors updated on Consortium activities and projects, e.g., standards of care. The membership dues may be charged to your Mastercard or Visa by calling 800-327-2289, or you may send a check to: The (Pacific) Consortium for Chiropractic Research, 1095 Dunford Way, Sunnyvale, CA 94087.

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