

Avoid "Courting" Malpractice Disaster

Dennis Semlow, DC

Nothing pierces straight to the heart of every doctor's fear like the threat of a malpractice suit. The complications and resultant damage professionally, financially, and emotionally are stuff of which nightmares are woven. How a DC may choose to approach the conduct of his practice is not necessarily an absolute indicator of whether he will remain free from a malpractice suit during the course of his professional life.

However, as many have painfully learned, there are sensible guidelines which the prudent follow and warning "flags" to which every doctor of chiropractic should be acquainted. Some of the principles are obvious; others are intricate and involve a large degree of educated and sound judgement.

We exist in a society where the law insists that responsibility and accountability especially visits itself upon those engaged in the healing arts. The doctor of chiropractic who is unprepared to measure up to the canons of those laws enforcing the rights of our patients to responsible health care, or a careless disregard or inexact performance can result in the "blitzkrieg" of a malpractice suit.

How often the story goes like this: A patient's health is placed in your hands. Everything is running according to procedure for one, or perhaps even several visits. During this process, maybe you even refer the patient to another physician who is a specialist in another field. Then a short time later -- wham! Like a locomotive, you get hit with a malpractice suit. Welcome to your nightmare.

Because of the ever-growing malpractice scourge, the member of the chiropractic profession needs to be on his toes, so as not to become the next victim whose professional career is wrecked on the tracks of the malpractice "train."

Fortunately, Dr. Dennis Semlow, a renowned lecturer and author and consultant in the areas of disability evaluation, independent examination, malpractice and office procedures will be writing a new monthly column in "DC" dealing with the analysis of actual case histories and of the events which led chiropractors to find themselves faced with charges of malpractice.

Dr. Semlow has worked on many malpractice cases and is frequently asked to serve as an expert witness and consultant on behalf of chiropractic. He is currently on the extension faculty of Palmer College, Logan College, and Cleveland Chiropractic College of Kansas City, and a speaker at many state licensing conventions, and a team teacher for Parker Foundation seminars.

Dr. Semlow has been an active member of both state and national chiropractic organizations for 17 years and has been voted "Chiropractor of the Year" by the Michigan Chiropractic Council in 1979. He has held various state positions, including president and chairman of the board of the Michigan Chiropractic Society. Dr. Semlow has served on the teaching faculty of the American Disability Evaluation Research Institute and a member of the National Association of Disability Evaluating Physicians. In addition, this very busy doctor is director of the Semlow Chiropractic Center in Fremont, Michigan.

We know that through the unique concept of this new column our readers will extract a valuable perspective of the makings of a malpractice suit through these case histories which are taken directly from OUM's insurance files. Although the names and circumstances are altered to protect the identity and privacy of the parties involved, these are the facts as they led up to the eventual malpractice charges and the legal outcomes. Please join us this issue, and each month as Dr. Dennis Semlow shares some remarkable case histories.

Take note and learn. The practice you save could be your own.

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