

Why Bother with Chiropractic History?

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It is surprising to find the relative disinterest shown by many doctors of chiropractic in the history of the profession. It seems incongruous that a group of professionals bonded together by a century of persecution do not show greater commitment to documenting and preserving this story. There are occasional explanations: DCs are isolated individualists, DCs fear letting the "true story" surface, doctors are "too busy getting sick people well," research is too expensive, or the suggestion that "we're focused on the future, not the past."

Perhaps there's some truth to all of these ideas, but there may also be a more fundamental reason: historical research and preservation efforts involve scholarship, and scholarship has been a rare commodity in chiropractic. Scholarship has not been a "luxury" that DCs have been exposed to; the idea of making lasting contributions to civilization and culture has not been impressed upon our students and doctors. Scholarship has been left to "the scholars," and in chiropractic medicine these have been few and far between.

To be sure, we can point to a number of doctors of chiropractic throughout this first century who have demonstrated genuine scholarship: Stanley P. Bolton, D.C.; A.E. Budden, D.C.; Scott Haldeman, D.C., Ph.D., M.D.; Roy W. Hilderbrandt, D.C.; A.E. Homewood, D.C., N.D., LL.D.; Fred W. Illi, D.C.; Joseph Janse, D.C.; Reed B. Phillips, D.C., D.A.C.B.R., Ph.D.; John J. Triano, D.C.; Howard Vernon, D.C.; C.O. Watkins, D.C.; Clarence Weiant, D.C., Ph.D. These folks have demonstrated (by their many published scientific and historical works) a commitment to high standards in developing new information and critical discussion, and to preserving this knowledge for posterity. Yet, the number of their ranks are still small, despite the proclivity the profession overall has shown for publication. As we approach the chiropractic centennial, it may be well to consider why scholarship, and particularly historical scholarship, should be important to chiropractors.

Identity

The story of chiropractic is a story of people: where they came from, the decisions and compromises they made, the internal beliefs and external forces which shaped them and their work. History provides a basis for assessing who and what this profession is now, for judging how well we've done in light of early goals, and for making decisions about where the profession should be headed. Like a time-series experiment, the first century of chiropractic provides a baseline against which current and future performance can be compared. The study of chiropractic history helps us to a better (i.e., more thorough, more critical) professional evaluation, and therefore greater self-understanding.

As an example, consider the tenacity with which many doctors hold on to the notion that philosophy is the glue that has held the profession together. In trying to appreciate what this means to DCs, one must first explore all the connotations of "philosophy" in chiropractic: from the profession's role in providing a cultural alternative to heroic and allopathic medicine to spizzerinctum and the hype of chiropractic motivational seminars, from rational but untested clinical theory to immutable laws and divine inspiration, and from the urge to be accepted as

coequal members of the healing professions to pursuit of isolation from the wider health care community. In trying to understand what this chiropractic glue is made of, one must recognize that "philosophy" means many different things to different chiropractors.

One of the things philosophy means in chiropractic is chiropractic history. Ask a senior doctor what philosophy means, and you may be told: its what he or she or a parent went to jail for. Here is strong glue, and it has lasted. The legal significance of "philosophy" should also be noted. B.J. found that a "separate and distinct philosophy" was a successful strategy in criminal suits for unlicensed medical practice by DCs, and useful also in seeking chiropractic licensure in the statehouses. Whether one thinks the profession has become too "separate and distinct" or not sufficiently so, it helps to understand this past, and thereby to know the evolution of current thinking.

Legacy

As a profession, chiropractic has a cultural responsibility to document and pass on to future generations, not only its clinical and theoretical developments, but also the paths by which it arrived at present practices and beliefs. As a would-be scientific and scholarly discipline, the chiropractic profession implicitly acknowledges the value of literary contribution to the progress of civilization, and commits itself before society to developing this written record in as objective a manner as possible. Closer to home, the current generation of DCs has an obligation to pass on the story of chiropractic's first 100 years to all future doctors.

Perhaps the greatest single example of historical preservation as a direct contribution to the development of civilization, as we know it, is provided by the medieval monks who labored for centuries to preserve the written work of the ancient Roman and Greek civilizations. The introduction of the printing press eventually made these forgotten works (philosophy, science, mathematics, poetry) available throughout Europe, and gave rise to the Renaissance. We should recognize from this the fragility of knowledge, and the importance of preserving the profession's knowledge base (including its philosophy, science and history) against another dark period or one of neglect. Chiropractic's efforts to preserve its own history is part of the gift the profession gives to all people for all time.

Utility

The recording of chiropractic history can have, and has had, practical significance for the profession. For example, in several states challenges to DCs' rights to use physical therapy modalities have been overcome with the aid of documentation of chiropractors' very early use of such methods (before there was a physical therapy profession). Although we probably could not justify the monumental effort that is needed in chiropractic history on the basis of serendipitous and occasional usefulness, one never knows when historical information may provide an immediate advantage.

Strategy

There are a variety of ways in which any of us can contribute to historical research in chiropractic, whether college trustee or CA, senior doctor or friend of the profession. Among these are membership in the Association for the History of Chiropractic (AHC) and with it a subscription to the AHC's journal, Chiropractic History. The AHC holds a seriously under-attended but excellent annual conference for historical papers (the next will be held on June 2, 1990 at Parker College of Chiropractic). The National Institute of Chiropractic Research (NICR) has established a fund for chiropractic historical investigations and preservation projects, and would welcome a donation.

Non-monetary contributions can include searching attics and basements for old books, journals, correspondence, legal documents, school records, and chiropractic equipment, and donating these treasures to a college archive. Oral interviews of senior doctors and family members are an inexpensive and enduring form of historical work. History clubs formed of field doctors, students and/or faculty could stimulate interest and collaboration in historical research.

The faculties of the several colleges have a special opportunity and responsibility to contribute to the historical record in the profession. Their more ready access to library archives and other scholarly resources should facilitate investigation and preservation efforts at the schools. College administrators should provide incentives for this work, and commit greater resources to the history of chiropractic. Obviously, greater financial support of the colleges by the field is pivotal to success.

In 2095, the chiropractic profession will celebrate its bicentennial. Will doctors at the end of the next century have an understanding of chiropractic's roots? Will our professional descendants be able to draw upon the insights and errors of the first 100 years to guide them in directing the future of chiropractic? The answer to these questions depends significantly upon how today's chiropractors answer the question: why bother with chiropractic history?

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