

## Public Relations Committee Accepts Challenge To Improve Chiropractic's Image in Texas

Editorial Staff

(Austin, Texas) -- Improving the image of chiropractic is the primary goal of the Texas Chiropractic Association's (TCA) public relations committee. Since 1988, the committee has focused all of its efforts and resources to achieving this goal.

"While the goal is ambitious, we believe we can make an impact, and so far, we have been successful," says DeWayne M. Mirtsching, D.C. of Austin, TCA's public relations committee chairman.

### Targeting Is Key to Success

"We have undertaken an innovative, aggressive, multi-faceted public relations program that targets specific messages to specific audiences." Explaining, he says, "By targeting our activities we reach new audiences and communicate more effectively. The fundamental goal throughout the program is to present a clear, consistent, positive, and quality image of chiropractic. In some cases, modifying existing programs, in others, initiating new programs."

Developing a new logo that is a stylized figure emphasizing the spine, people, and Texas was the first step. With the new logo, all materials throughout the association project a positive image of chiropractic.

In 1988-89, two innovative projects debuted: the Public Image Campaign (PIC) and Spinal Health Awareness Program in Education (SHAPE). Both projects targeted new audiences and used new communications techniques for the association. The Spinal Awareness Month (SAM) project that already existed, was revamped and strengthened.

### Positioning Doctors of Chiropractic As Specialists

The public image campaign was a major undertaking, and a first for TCA. Prior to this campaign, little had been done association-wide to communicate through the mass media to the general public. Due to budget constraints, the committee had to develop a campaign that was so dynamic that individual doctors of chiropractic and TCA Districts would commit to purchase not only the materials, but also to the advertising space and/or air time. The campaign was widely accepted and utilized statewide.

The campaign positions doctors of chiropractic as specialists and members of the health care team. This positioning is featured in the headline, "The World's Finest Instruments are Tuned by Specialists." This headline, a large photograph of a piano keyboard, and succinct copy, combine to deliver a powerful, positive image about chiropractic. An established advertising agency developed the campaign, which consists of radio and newspaper advertisements, complimentary posters, direct-mail postcards, and window decals.

Doctors using the campaign said that the materials worked very well for them. "Well done, very

professional. The campaign puts chiropractic in a very positive light, and boosts our image in the community," said Kevin Raef, D.C. of Canyon, in the Texas panhandle.

#### Student's First Perception of Chiropractic Is Positive

Another first for TCA was the SHAPE project. The premise was to teach elementary students the importance of back health, that doctors of chiropractic are the back specialists, and how to take care of the back. By teaching these concepts early, their first impression of chiropractic would be positive and remain positive throughout their lives. SHAPE was TCA's first entry into the school system and has received exceptional enthusiasm and acceptance from teachers and doctors alike. In 1989 alone, some 66,000 students, 2,600 teachers, and more than 100 doctors participated in the program, tripling the figures from the previous year.

The unique feature of SHAPE is the involvement of doctors in the classroom. First, teachers present the SHAPE curriculum and then, doctors visit the classroom and conduct reinforcement activities ranging from reviewing models of the spine, to demonstrating with a mime, to staging puppet shows. The program provides elementary school teachers with a complete and easy-to-use curriculum guide full of reinforcement activities and hands-on learning opportunities; student worksheet and overhead transparency masters; a parent newsletter; and SHAPE bookmarks are available for every student.

According to Michael P. McGarrah, D.C. of Fort Worth, District 4 SHAPE coordinator, "All the 'essentials' that were imperative for school administrators to think the program was credible and important, were part of the materials. It presented a quality image of the SHAPE project, and of TCA. It shows that TCA has its act together."

#### TCA Teams Up with the American Red Cross

The committee was dedicated to the SAM project, but it had been ineffective for a number of years. "It is important to reach the working adult, those most at risk for back problems, but the existing program wasn't effective. So we revamped it and developed new materials, but the challenge was motivating doctors to participate," said Dr. Mirtsching. "The response was amazing, in 1988, only two districts participated, in 1989, that increased to eight."

The critical success element of the SAM project is the involvement of the American Red Cross chapters throughout the state. In 1988, TCA and the American Red Cross formed a partnership to educate Texans about their backs, by including the Red Cross back injury prevention class in the SAM program. Doctors are certified (through modified instruction trainer courses) to teach the back class to the public and work with Red Cross volunteers to arrange back classes. The partnership allows the TCA to offer these classes, free of charge, to the public during the month of November.

Another key aspect of the SAM program are the spinal evaluation clinics conducted by doctors in shopping malls, YMCAs/YWCAs, and health clubs. Doctors briefly examine individual's backs and give general recommendations, including a written evaluation. Speeches to civic groups and media promotions round out the SAM activities.

"This was the most successful SAM program we've ever had. More doctors and districts participated than ever before. It's very exciting to see all of this activity," said Randy L. Markum, D.C. of Bedford near Fort Worth, statewide SAM coordinator.

#### Involvement of Doctors Is Critical

Creating innovative programs is only one half of the challenge, according to Dr. Mirtsching. The other, and equally important half, is involving more doctors in telling the chiropractic story. "No one can tell our story as well as we can. This is a critical component of changing chiropractic's image," he said.

To involve more doctors in the public relations process, a statewide committee was recruited and includes a coordinator for each major project and one to handle media relations. The 1989-90 committee includes Dr. Markum; Jarrett Armstrong, D.C. of Forth Worth; and Tina A. Schroeter, D.C. of Austin. The state committee recruited local committees at the district level to be part of the overall public relations team.

"The committee's approach is direct and cost effective," according to Dr. Mirtsching. The statewide committee plans, develops materials, and sets direction. The district committees secure funding for the programs, and coordinate them throughout the district with individual doctors working directly with the public. "This approach was critical to achieve the goals we set. To make an impact, we had to keep costs of the programs reasonable, and motivate as many districts and doctors as possible to participate, ultimately teaching as many Texans as possible," he said.

#### News Coverage for Chiropractic

A major initiative for the committee in 1989 was increasing the media coverage for the association. "To accomplish this," Dr. Mirtsching says, "we hired media relations consultants in the largest Texas media markets. The geography of Texas limits our ability to effectively work with all the media from one central location. We found these consultants to have much more success."

The consultants generated television, radio, and newspaper coverage in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex, San Antonio, and Houston. The Austin area was covered by the committee. In addition, news releases localized for TCA Board members' individual markets were distributed announcing the antitrust victory against the American Medical Association, the enactment of the new chiropractic law in Texas, and the installation of new officers.

#### Success Over the Long Term

According to Dr. Mirtsching, "We made great strides in two years, but we have to steadfastly hold to our foundation of simplicity, consistency and quality in the upcoming years. Improving chiropractic's image needs repetition, commitment, and creative and innovative initiatives over the long term."

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