

Firestorm 2003

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As firestorms began to ravage areas of San Diego County last October, fire-fighters began their heroic efforts battling what would quickly become the most devastating wildfires in the history of California. Judging by the scope and breadth of these fires as they rampaged through rural and suburban neighborhoods in San Diego, no one knew who was safe and what devastation lay ahead.

Like almost everyone else, I was glued to the TV, watching the progress of the fires and gathering details on the impending dangers. Most of the freeways in the East County had been closed and evacuations in many neighborhoods were underway. As I drove to my office Monday morning for what was to be a short day, the scene was surreal. Visibility was very poor: There were blizzard-like conditions, yet no snow was falling; ash, and soot and dark smoke were all I could see. I will never forget my drive that day - it felt eerily familiar to the conditions I observed in New York on 9/11. As I arrived at my office, patients were showing up for their appointments (incredibly); with concern for their safety, we called the afternoon patients and advised them to stay home.

Reflecting on the unfolding events, I recalled my frustration in September 2001, being on a different coast and unable to help. This time, I felt compelled to do something; to provide whatever type of aid, assistance and help I could. As soon as I heard that a main staging area was going to be set up at Gillespie Field in El Cajon, I knew I had to be there.

When I arrived, I introduced myself to one of the medical personnel in a Red Cross tent and was directed to an area just adjacent to a large, tented food court. Several massage therapists were already set up, and firefighters were lining up for treatment. Affording these brave men and women chiropractic services seemed a natural way to thank them for their efforts. I loaded up my portable table and some supplies, then headed back to Gillespie Field with my office manager, Christina, who also happens to be my wife. In the makeshift treatment area, I was pleased to be joined by a colleague and former classmate, Dr. Marc Lewis.

The demand for chiropractic treatment was virtually nonstop. The physical demands of battling these enormous fires left so many firefighters in need of the relief, correction, and nervous system energy restoration chiropractic adjustments can provide.

By Wednesday evening, the battle to contain the wildfires was in full swing, with firefighters arriving from all parts of California and the Western United States. In addition to treating patients from all parts of San Diego, Orange and Los Angeles counties, I also treated many men from northern California, Arizona, Nevada and Colorado. Many stated they had never seen anything like these fires before. Three separate fires - the Cedar fire, the Paradise fire, and the Otay fire - initially stretched all available resources to the limit, so the great show of support from all of the neighboring fire departments and strike teams was greatly welcomed. While the stress and extremely long shifts required to fight these fires was obviously exhausting, the spirit and commitment toward saving San Diego never wavered.

By Thursday evening, the firefighters began to gain the upper hand; however, several hotspots remained, particularly in the towns of Alpine and Julian. I was fortunate enough to hear many

stories of the remarkable efforts being demonstrated in the field. One elite strike team from Arizona had driven 10 hours to arrive on the scene, then was sent directly into action for three days straight, working on just several hours sleep. Upon returning to Gillespie Field, the feedback from the firemen was tremendous; they could not have been more grateful or thankful that chiropractic care was made available to them. While many had received the benefits of chiropractic adjustments before, many had never been afforded comprehensive chiropractic treatment. We provided spinal and extremity adjustments and myofascial release; stretched and loosened tight shoulders, hips and knees to lessen sore and tired muscles; restored vertebrae back to their proper motion and position; and alleviated nerve pressure and irritation. This allowed many of the firemen to obtain a more restful and better night's sleep.

It was a privilege to be able to participate in some small way in this cause. Helping care for those who risk so much reminds me once again why I am so proud and honored to be part of the chiropractic profession.

On Nov. 4, President Bush arrived in San Diego and toured several of the devastated neighborhoods. He consoled some of the residents and offered words of encouragement for the future. The president and his contingent, which included Governor-Elect Arnold Schwarzenegger and outgoing Governor Gray Davis, proceeded to the main staging area at Gillespie Field, accompanied by many local officials. The president thanked the firefighters and volunteers for all of their efforts. To see the president come to the very same place and stand on the same grounds where the firefighters received chiropractic care made me especially proud of all those who volunteered their time and efforts.

In the aftermath of this remarkable week, there was considerable talk and controversy regarding the available resources, assistance and response time from state, federal and military agencies. It's important to note that doctors of chiropractic were on the job right away, providing relief, reassurance and essential care to those on the front lines.

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