

The Changing Face of Chiropractic Education

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The late 1980s were great years for chiropractic. We had entered an era of insurance coverage, and managed care was just a crazy new idea that probably wouldn't work. Those were the days of plenty for chiropractic practices and chiropractic colleges.

As DCs earned good livings, they enthusiastically encouraged others to become doctors of chiropractic. Existing chiropractic colleges were able to choose the best students from robust pools of applicants. New chiropractic colleges began as applicant demand outpaced the number of college "seats" available.

Only a few years later, Life Chiropractic College became the largest chiropractic institution in the world with more than 3,000 students.

Needless to say, times have changed:

- Total chiropractic college enrollment in the United States has dropped by more than 30 percent in the past seven years.
- According to recent figures, Life's enrollment has dropped from more than 3,500 to less than 1,000.
- Instead of having too many applicants, most colleges don't have enough to fill the classes.

New challenges have required different leadership for our chiropractic colleges. Many of today's chiropractic college presidents have only been in office for a few years. Instead of the clinically successful chiropractors of the past, experienced educators (who may or may not be DCs) run most of our chiropractic colleges.

Life and Sherman, two colleges known for their strong chiropractic philosophies, are currently run by nonchiropractors. The vast majority of our college presidents have come up through the ranks of academia, rather than retiring from successful chiropractic practices.

None of this should come as a big surprise.

Like the chiropractic profession itself, chiropractic education is maturing. Today's new DCs have to be ready to succeed in an extremely competitive market. They have to navigate their way through managed care, build alliances with other providers, and be ready to satisfactorily address the inquiries of increasingly knowledgeable patients.

Palmer University has three colleges that may be due for new leadership.* In the interim, Palmer has opted for experienced academicians (Dr. Don Kern at Palmer Davenport, Dr. Peter Martin at Palmer West and Dr. Gloria Niles at Palmer Florida). It would not be surprising to see Palmer follow the same path most of the other chiropractic colleges have taken when making their final decisions for leadership.

This is not to say that the chiropractic profession doesn't need or cannot benefit from the experience of successful practitioners who are able to share what they've learned - far from it. But

the challenges currently facing our chiropractic colleges require different tools and talents.

Look for some exciting changes to occur in chiropractic education over the next decade. This area of our profession is poised to make great strides as the opportunities present themselves.

*For more information, see "Riekeman Resigns Palmer Presidency" on the front page of this issue.

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