

## Life West Hosts Historic WFC Meeting on Chiropractic Identity

Editorial Staff

Last year, the World Federation of Chiropractic (WFC) announced the creation of an international Task Force on Identity.<sup>1</sup> Chaired by Drs. Paul Carey, Gerard Clum and Peter Dixon, and comprised of 40 members representing 14 countries and 13 chiropractic colleges,<sup>2</sup> the purpose of the task force is to "direct and facilitate an inclusive and comprehensive international consultation with members of the profession and other relevant parties on the public identity of the chiropractic profession."

The task force held its first meeting Feb. 25-28, signifying a tremendous step forward in the chiropractic profession's attempt to establish a clear and effective public identity.<sup>3</sup> The meeting was held on the campus of Life Chiropractic College West in Hayward, Calif., which provided ample meeting space and technology to record the event on both audio and video.

### Meeting Highlights

The first day of the meeting included presentations by five public members of the task force, marketing experts from the U.S. and Canada, and representatives of the medical and third-party payor sectors. This format allowed the rest of the task force an opportunity to receive feedback from health care providers outside the chiropractic profession and members of the general public.

Mark Sarner, president of a social marketing company in Toronto, declared that "identity controls destiny," and stated that chiropractors have significant identity issues that must be dealt with now. Bram Briggance, PhD, a health policy expert from the University of California at San Francisco, agreed with Mr. Sarner. "The chiropractic profession needs to stop building fences and put up a pole" that presents a single, clear identity of chiropractic, remarked Dr. Briggance, adding that for him, that "pole" should be expertise related to the spine.

Three other public representatives - Irene Turner, PhD, Matthew Givrad, PhD, and Pran Manga, PhD, agreed that chiropractic needs an identity that is simple; that can be expressed in language both the public and decision-makers can understand; and that passes three tests of credibility:

1. The identity must be consistent with chiropractic's education and knowledge base.
2. The identity must correlate with the clinical experience of patients when they consult a chiropractor.
3. The identity must connect as much as possible with the public's present identity of the chiropractor as a doctor for the back or spine.

On the second day, the emphasis of the meeting shifted from public comment to discussion by members of the chiropractic profession. Dr. Carl Cleveland III, president of Cleveland College of Chiropractic (Kansas City and Los Angeles), opened the meeting with a clear, optimistic message. According to Dr. Cleveland, all chiropractors, whether they employ a "mechanistic" or "vitalistic" philosophy, have certain core elements in common that allow the public to relate to all of them.

While chiropractors may use different language to describe the care they perform and pursue different goals, they all approach the health and well-being of patients through adjustments and/or manipulation to address vertebral subluxations and/or joint dysfunction, and the impact of spinal problems on biomechanical and neurological integrity.

Dr. Cheryl Hawk, director of research at Parker College of Chiropractic, mentioned a theme endorsed by other speakers: Because chiropractors spend too much time talking with themselves, using their own interpretation of language, it leaves those outside the profession confused as to how to categorize chiropractic. As a result, federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the Bureau of Health Professions simply do not know how, or where, to classify chiropractic in terms of planning, research and other avenues.

Drs. Dan Quattro, president of the New York State Chiropractic Association, and Greg Oke, president of the New Zealand Chiropractors' Association, pointed out that one of the major problems facing chiropractic is a general lack of trust by the public - a problem many of those in attendance agreed must be addressed.

"In New Zealand," observed Dr. Oke, "we provide a broad canvas for our members, and they can practice their brand of chiropractic or paint on any corner of that canvas. The boundaries, however, are ethics and standards of practice." Those standards are strongly policed, Dr. Oke said, not only to protect patients, but also to protect the reputation and integrity of chiropractic.

On the meeting's third day, the task force continued its work on the development of an electronic survey questionnaire. According to Dr. Carey, "This survey will take about 15 minutes to complete, will be available online, and will have questions on the importance of identity and many issues relevant to that, such as are chiropractors mainstream or complementary and alternative, and what are the attributes that define the chiropractic profession from the perspectives of chiropractors, patients, other health professionals and the public generally."

Initial plans call for the survey to be made available to all chiropractors worldwide between April and June 2004.<sup>4</sup> Results will be presented at the WFC's 8th Biennial Assembly in Sydney, Australia in June 2005.

Further updates on the status of the WFC International Task Force on Identity will be published in *Dynamic Chiropractic* and posted on [ChiroWeb.com](http://ChiroWeb.com) as they become available.

## References

1. WFC establishes task force on chiropractic identity. *Dynamic Chiropractic* Nov. 3, 2003. [www.chiroweb.com/archives/21/23/19.html](http://www.chiroweb.com/archives/21/23/19.html).
2. WFC task force assembled. *Dynamic Chiropractic* Dec. 15, 2003. [www.chiroweb.com/archives/21/26/16.html](http://www.chiroweb.com/archives/21/26/16.html).
3. WFC's world meeting on identity at Life West: project to establish chiropractic's world wide identity. World Federation of Chiropractic press release, March 2, 2004.
4. According to the WFC's press release, information on the methods and dates for the survey will be posted online ([www.wfc.org](http://www.wfc.org)) in the next few months.

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