# More Than Back Pain

Donald M. Petersen Jr., BS, HCD(hc), FICC(h), Publisher

The April 26, 2004 issue of *Newsweek* includes an article on back pain (see the front page of this issue) and reviews a number of potential therapies for back pain sufferers. The article shows little tolerance for surgical procedures that have varied success rates, and even hints at the fact that back surgery is much overutilized.

When discussing the alternatives, the author gives chiropractic the title of "the most popular nonsurgical back therapy."

There it is again, where it will be read by approximately 4.4 million people in 190 countries in six languages: Chiropractic is for back pain!

Doesn't anyone understand that chiropractic is for much more than back pain?

Don't they have any clue about wellness?

When will the media ever understand chiropractic?

When will they ever get it right?

My answers to the above four questions are: no, no, probably never and probably never, in that order:

- As we continue to lack the unified effort necessary to tell our own story, very few in the media will ever understand chiropractic. Why should they; we haven't told them much of anything on a consistent basis. Based on our own marketing efforts, we're fortunate that they can even spell it right.
- And no, they don't understand wellness. This is a concept that is counter-cultural to Western medicine. Our society is basically focused on the "have a problem - take a pill" approach to health. They define health as no problems. Wellness is a new concept that few understand.
- Given our inability to communicate as a profession, the media, as a group, will probably never understand chiropractic. Our best hope is to educate individuals about chiropractic and wellness. Some will be the authors of these articles, and others will provide input to the authors. Without a consistent, effective marketing effort, we have to educate the media one journalist at a time.
- With all they don't understand, the media is giving our profession a great opportunity. If we can see it and take advantage of it, we can make great progress toward educating the public about what chiropractic is all about.

Considering that more than 80 percent of the U.S. population suffers from back pain at some point puts us in a rather advantageous position. It's not like we treat some rare disease that only affects 400 people a year; sooner or later, everyone needs chiropractic.

The market is clearly there. The question is, how can we drive that market in our direction?

Like wearing attractive clothes at a party, back pain is not a bad label. Nice clothes don't tell

anyone about who you are, but they afford you the opportunity to meet people and let them get to know you. Likewise, the "back pain specialist" label doesn't begin to express you as a doctor of chiropractic, but it is an open door to educate patients and expand their thinking into the wellness model.

The problem is not that we get labeled; everyone does. Our human natures prompt us to reduce people we don't know to the lowest common denominators, which are generally labels. The problem is that most of us still aren't taking the time to inform and educate our patients.

Think about it: If you gave your patients a 10-question test about the ability of chiropractic to impact their health in areas beyond back pain, how many would pass?

And if you're not telling them any differently, the label sticks.

They come to you for back pain, and go to a number of other medical and alternative health providers for other ailments. Without a clear understanding of chiropractic, patients see you as just one of the many specialists they see, as they self-refer based upon the knowledge they have (lack) about chiropractic.

And while we may not like it, the "back pain specialist" label is probably the best we can hope for until we do our own marketing. Until then, let's stop complaining and use it to our advantage. It's an open opportunity to the world.

*DMP Jr.*

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