

The Power of the Press

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I was pleased to prepare a short article in celebration of the 500th issue of *Dynamic Chiropractic (DC)*. I remember very well that first issue more than 20 years ago. It was Dr. Donald M. Petersen Sr.'s vision to create a vehicle for communicating with every chiropractor on planet Earth. It was a bold plan, and it was not at all certain in the beginning whether it would succeed. Would anyone in the profession read it? Would advertisers buy space to sell their products? Would there be enough news fit to print each month, and could it be offered in a reader-friendly fashion?

In hindsight, it's obvious that Don Sr. knew what he was doing. *Dynamic Chiropractic* has become a formidable force within the chiropractic profession. It has been there to report good news and bad - and report it has! The periodical has reinvented itself several times during these 500 editions (e.g., more frequent publication, Web publishing) and will undoubtedly continue to reshape itself as the profession evolves, as advertisers change, and as the sophistication of the readership demands.

As I stared at the latest issue of *DC* before writing this article, I wondered where the profession might be today if *DC* had not become a reality. Don Sr.'s creative leadership, now vested in Don Jr., has yielded a dependable source of information about current events in the profession worldwide. *DC* has sought a balance in journalism that merits recognition, particularly in light of today's controversy over political correctness in the media. I don't mean to suggest that Don Jr. and his team at *DC* lack a point of view, but I do sense an effort to bring balance to reporting events in the profession and to self-reflect upon the role that the press should play. As well, I note that *DC* enjoys a degree of independence from the professional/political concerns of our multiple trade associations, and I believe that augurs well for the readership.

Information is power, and should be wielded with caution and deliberation. Those who exercise the power of the pen have a responsibility to the profession to report the facts without distortion. Yet, we have seen instances in recent times of chiropractic periodicals whose editors and publishers use their influence to advance personal agendas and pet theories that undermine professional progress. The profession deserves news reported in a truly "no spin" manner, in order to enable the reader to evaluate the issues based on facts, not bias. I'm not advocating censorship, but rather, the use of the "common sense" that any grade-school student could analyze in a moment. What will happen when our media and those who do not support the current advancements make it appear that "everyone" in the profession is against the CCE, ACC, FCLB, or the Trigon litigation?

George McAndrews recently wrote a beautiful letter to the media in which he noted that he and his four brothers had served in the U.S. Navy. His pride in his military service was exemplified by his statement:

The Marshall Plan in Europe and the reconstruction of Japan bear out America's greatness. Kuwait, Kosovo, and Afghanistan bring that greatness down to date. Iraq removed this generation's Hitler. We sat on our hands in Rwanda and more than 500,000 died. If America had had the will to ignore the naysayers and to join the battle against Hitler in 1939, before Hitler was capable of building his industry, his army and vast array of weapons, possibly some 50,000,000 deaths in WW II could have been

avoided. Let the naysayers contemplate that.

History teaches us that when America is united, nothing can stop this great nation. Could we not say the same about our profession? When we've united in support of a common goal, we've been unstoppable. It was unified action for a common purpose that produced licensure in all 50 states, despite a powerful political adversary. The coordinated efforts of the Federation of Chiropractic Licensing Boards and its progeny, the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners, enabled us to overcome decades of subordination to the basic science laws. We were divided in our quest for federal accreditation of our schools, but in the years since the CCE has reached this milestone, the profession has advanced together toward goals that seemed impossible once upon a time. We came together successfully to establish services for Medicare patients, and collectively stood up for our rights against the AMA in the Wilk case.

Despite these many lessons, internal divisiveness continues to plague us. There are those within our ranks who would rather self-destruct than exercise common sense in their opposition to progress. Recent attempts to block the DoD and VA bills are clear examples. There are those among us who would destroy the CCE and the significant improvements that federal accreditation has provided for our profession. We have all too often been, and continue to be, our own worst enemies.

There are elements within the chiropractic press today that undermine the progress of the profession because of a belief system that is out of sync with the vast majority of the profession. I do not question their dedication; I question their understanding of the consequences of their actions. That small, but vocal minority who opposes the profession's development as a credible, science-oriented provider group often seems grossly unfamiliar with the history of the very profession it claims to want to preserve.

In their quest to "protect" chiropractic, some within the profession seek to maintain theoretical, technical or ideological "purity," as though the ideas of the founders were carved in stone. In reality, the Palmers and other early pioneers were not locked into a single theory; they felt free to innovate and revise as circumstance and insight suggested to them. "Old Dad Chiro," who was clearly interested in the art of diagnosis,¹ offered no less than three distinct versions of his chiropractic.² His son is well-known for repeated technical (e.g., X-ray, NCM) and theoretical revisions (e.g., upper cervical adjusting only).³ Since that time, professional leaders and innovators have repeatedly altered their views of chiropractic and continued to modify their approaches - some for scientific or educational reasons; some for economic gain; some for political advancement; and some for personal aggrandizement.

What part has *DC* played in the overall advancement for the profession? *Dynamic Chiropractic* has seen fit to print provocative views that once were considered taboo among chiropractors, and thereby to bring greater balance to our internal dialogue. For example, are we going to embrace a position of dogma - or one of science? Can we hope to achieve parity, equal reimbursement, military status and cultural authority when segments from within are willing to adhere to dogma? *DC* has provided a forum where the myth of incontrovertible, a priori "truth" has been challenged, and in so doing, it has raised the level of critical thinking within the profession.

We know chiropractic is a wonderful profession, and deserving of greater recognition and parity within the health care community. *DC's* numerous authors and columnists have pointed repeatedly to our crying need to test each of our clinical hypotheses before we make claims of their veracity. In this 21st century, embracing dogma and clouding the real issues with emotionally charged words do not serve us well. We must exercise common sense in the face of those who seek to

destroy or impede growth and advancement by maintaining a dogmatic position.

What can we learn from those elements of chiropractic media who seek to proffer their views as the only views? Can we apply some semblance of rational thought to help us solve our professional issues? I certainly hope so. To those among us who insist upon inflexible and antiquated concepts, I recommend a review of the reality of our history: We have always been evolving, and efforts to lock us into "one cause, one cure" or one "true philosophy" have never been helpful. Just as our founding fathers and pioneers saw fit to modify and adapt their thinking and methods to meet the circumstances of their times, so too must we be willing to "think outside the box" and craft a profession to meet the challenges of our time.

Thanks to *Dynamic Chiropractic* for the opportunity to use the power of our individual pens to tell it like it is today. Freedom of speech and of the press is a cherished, but fragile tool, as Sir Winston Churchill so eloquently noted:

Everybody is in favor of free speech. Hardly a day passes without its being extolled, but some people's idea of it is that they are free to say what they like, but if anyone says anything back, that is an outrage."

The power of the press is awesome, and on 500 occasions, *Dynamic Chiropractic* has provided each and every chiropractor with the opportunity to express his or her views about any and all issues affecting our profession. Whether or not we take advantage of this exceptional opportunity is solely ours to decide and to exercise. DC provides a forum for advancement and diversity; it is up to us to use this platform wisely in order to forge a stronger profession.

References

1. Palmer, D.D. *The Science, Art and Philosophy of Chiropractic: The Chiropractor's Adjuster*. Portland, Oregon: Portland Printing House, 1910.
2. Keating, Joseph C. The embryology of chiropractic thought. *European Journal of Chiropractic* December 1991;39(3):75-89.
3. Keating, Joseph C. *B.J. of Davenport: The Early Years of Chiropractic*. Davenport, Iowa: Association for the History of Chiropractic, 1997.

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