

Private Chiropractor

John Hanks, DC

The city had lapsed into that deep, concrete-basted heat so common for August. Standing and looking out a window in my office, I watched the trash man in the alley below snuff out his cigarette with his heel. He hadn't even smoked half of it. It was too hot to smoke.

The government had made smoking totally illegal back in 2017, but you could still spy someone having a cig in his or her garage now and then. The law wasn't really enforced, because the big multinational health care corporations (MHCs) had a lot of tobacco and marijuana stock in their portfolios. After all, these substances were considered important medicines in most of Africa and Asia by now, and sales of "inhaled herbals" were encouraged outside of the United States.

It was difficult to separate the giant health care companies from the other global mega-corporations that seemed more like quasi-governments. In the year 2019, the United Nations had become the United National Federation of Commerce and Responsibility. But enough about that. I only bring it up to illustrate how life is in the third decade of the 21st century. The MHCs had corralled the health business by now, and all providers were tracked in real time by managed care IT systems that knew everything about everything going on in our offices. Control by the government and MHCs depended on this information. Cash had been outlawed, so even those doctors who didn't accept the MHC terms had their behavior tracked by credit and debit card transactions.

A tiny fraction of the chiropractic profession went underground.

I gave up on cash and became a "barter only" DC years ago. That action made me an anachronism, a throwback in these modern times. But I wanted to be a doctor who didn't work for "The Man."

That's me, Johnny Hawks - Private Chiropractor.

It was the end of the day, and I was ready to leave the office and go get a beer and corned beef sandwich at Mike's Elbow Room, when my all-around assistant, Marge, knocked on my private office door and simultaneously opened it. "You've got one more patient, a new one. So hold your horses," she said. Marge's job is to keep me on task, an often-futile pursuit.

As the patient walked in, her gait gave her away: stiff, antalgic, slow. I pegged her as about 40, divorced, and with the kind of curves in her figure that made me think of the old interstate clover-leaves. She got right down to business. "I've failed every kind of treatment. Chiropractic is the only thing that has kept me going for years, but recently, I've been getting worse. The surgeons want to put an artificial disc in my lower back. I don't want it, and I was told you knew some of the reasons not to have it done." She tried to smile as she straightened her toga. "I've got to know the truth before I try this."

The truth was that the old fashioned artificial disc was 50-50 at best. But in 2026, the Wellnessco Company introduced the Omega Disc. I was a consultant on the project - before I got fed up. It included features such as a beeping alarm if the patient bent over and twisted too far. A morphine

pump was included, as well as a GPS location chip, a height-inflatable option for rough traveling, and an optional wireless Internet connector. The failure rate was high, but was kept secret enough to keep the Wellnessco stock high. The managed care networks seemed to like it, since most of their executives were on the Wellnessco board of directors. The Lambast Network, Managed Care Extraordinaire, American Specialty Hologram, Mondo Chiropractico ... they all advocated it.

With some emotion, I responded. "Listen, Angel. You seem like a swell gal, so don't go near that thing, you see?" She seemed not to hear me, so I spoke more quietly. "That gadget is only good for clones and criminals. Stay with what you know ... meditation, chiropractic, virtual reality, vodka martinis, but not that thing." Her face slowly seemed to relax.

"I was told you would say that," she sighed. I gave her some proprietary research that exposed the Omega Disc, given to me by The Fat Man. I warned her that she and I would end up as chopped liver if the word got out that she had this information. Then, I tried to reassure her. Maybe that new botanical made from bindweed and crab grass could help her pain. Maybe a retired surgeon friend, who still knew the old microsurgical techniques, might exam her.

She asked me to treat her. We agreed on our terms of barter (the specifics of which HIPAA law prohibits me to discuss). I adjusted her, and she told me it was one of the best she had ever had. Yeah, right ... but we'll see if she calls again. After all, not everyone is cut out to be a patient of a private chiropractor.

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