

Dr. Reed Phillips - Dynamic Chiropractic's Person of the Year

Editorial Staff

When the Veterans Affairs Chiropractic Advisory Committee met for the first time in September 2002, it was a historic event - in every sense of the word. Dubbed the committee "designed to fail," the Chiropractic Advisory Committee was perhaps the most diverse group ever assembled, both chiropractically and medically, and assigned a task of such magnitude. Among other things, the committee was charged with initiating a "major occupational study" of the chiropractic profession and creating a list of recommendations as to how chiropractic would be incorporated into the VA system.

The committee included six doctors of chiropractic, along with two medical doctors, an osteopathic physician, a physical therapist, and a representative of a veterans service organization. They were all appointed by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi, in an effort to represent a wide range of diverse health care professions and perspectives.

On the chiropractic side, committee representatives spanned the spectrum of chiropractic philosophy, from chiropractic medicine to the most conservative. Getting such an eclectic group of practitioners to put their differences aside and work for the betterment of chiropractic was a truly Herculean task, and one that initially caused concern among many in the chiropractic profession. Appointed to chair the committee was Reed Phillips, DC, PhD, president of Southern California University of Health Sciences and one of chiropractic's most well-known representatives.

While he initially declined the position of chair, Dr. Phillips was the guiding force during the eight times the Chiropractic Advisory Committee convened. Through his leadership, the committee stayed the course and stuck to its goal - providing Sec. Principi with sound advice that would ultimately result in the development and implementation of a program of chiropractic care to benefit the nation's veterans.

Working together for more than a year, the advisory committee drafted a series of 38 recommendations on chiropractic and submitted them to Sec. Principi in November 2003. On March 30, 2004, Sec. Principi announced a plan to implement the committee's recommendations, acknowledging that his overall goal was "to ensure that chiropractic care is ultimately available and accessible to veterans who need it throughout the DVA system."

The doctors of chiropractic on the committee agreed on all but one issue: direct access. The committee ultimately settled on language that would require only the barest of requirements for a referral - a "consult." Within the VA structure, a consult could be as little as an e-mail. As Dr. Phillips noted: "In the VA system, you have 350,000 people on the waiting list who are not being cared for because of lack of physicians." The evidence suggests that more than 50 percent of all VA patients present with some kind of musculoskeletal ailment. That being the case, the 300-plus doctors of chiropractic expected to serve in the VA health system will have no shortage of patients.

The committee's efforts have already begun to bear fruit for the chiropractic profession. In September 2004, Tim Dennis, DC, CCRD, was selected to begin treating patients at the Togus

Veterans Affairs Medical & Regional Office Center in Augusta, Maine, making him the first doctor of chiropractic to be officially hired by the VA. And according to the Chiropractic Advisory Committee's final report, published Oct. 25, 2004, the Department of Veterans Affairs is currently offering chiropractic care at 27 facilities throughout the country, providing much-needed services to thousands of veterans.

An added benefit will be academic affiliations between VA hospitals and chiropractic colleges. These affiliations will let students rotate through the VA facilities, establish resident positions, and create opportunities to apply for collaborative research funding. By receiving exposure to the hospital setting, tomorrow's doctors of chiropractic will develop as integrated members of the health care team even before they graduate.

The VA Chiropractic Advisory Committee has been extended through 2005 to oversee implementation of Secretary Principi's recommendation. Dr. Phillips will continue to lead the committee to see the project through.

Because of his tireless dedication to the Chiropractic Advisory Committee over the past two years and into next year, Dr. Phillips has been selected as *Dynamic Chiropractic's* Person of the Year for 2004.

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