

A Report on the United National Public Relations Campaign

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Happy New Year, and welcome to a new year in chiropractic! The background work on our United National Public Relations Campaign has been going strong for more than a year. At this point in time, I want to review the accomplishments that we have made and discuss our plans for the future.

Background

As we all know, chiropractic has been around for 110 years, and we have not put forth a unified message to the public. I call chiropractic the best-kept secret in health care. It is a challenge for the public to understand us, value us, or be motivated to use us, when we can't effectively explain who we are, what we can do for them, and how we do it. The public doesn't realize all the good things that chiropractic has to offer, and the facts reflect this:

- Only one in 10 Americans is a chiropractic patient.
- Enrollment in chiropractic colleges is down more than 30 percent over the past six years.
- The media gives us more negative coverage than positive.

Step 1: The Meeting

Realizing that we needed to do something to help the chiropractic profession, a group of chiropractic leaders was called together at the Congress of Chiropractic State Associations (COCSA) meeting in Las Vegas in November 2003. I invited people that I knew were thinking of starting their own individual public relations campaigns. The facts about chiropractic listed above were used to establish the need for a united national PR effort. After hearing the case for a united effort, these leaders signed two documents: the *Declaration of National Public Relations Unity* and the *Pledge of National Public Relations Unity*. Basically, they agreed to not start any public relations efforts on their own and to work together on a united national public relations campaign.

Some of the chiropractic organizations that signed the agreement were the American Chiropractic Association (ACA), the International Chiropractors Association (ICA), the Foundation for Chiropractic Education and Research (FCER), the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners (NBCE), the Association of Chiropractic Colleges (ACC), and the Student American Chiropractic Association (SACA).

At the meeting, we established the need to get a public relations firm to do a scientific analysis of the consumer marketplace, and from that analysis, generate a message with one goal - to get the public to make an appointment to see a chiropractor. We agreed that the firm should develop the message, not the chiropractors. Nothing has changed regarding this issue. In order for this to work, I told the group: We need your money and support, but not your opinions. We can't do what we've done in the past; having many chiropractors from many factions get in a room and tell a firm what to do. That will not work. Let the pros do it.

Step 2: The Foundation for Chiropractic Progress

The next step was the formation of the Foundation for Chiropractic Progress, which is a 501(c)(3) foundation that allows you to make tax-deductible donations. This is very important; it allows chiropractic associations, chiropractic colleges, chiropractic vendors, individual chiropractors, and the public to donate money for this effort.

Step 3: The Firm

Once the foundation was in place to collect the funds, we needed to conduct a search to find the best public relations firm in North America to work with us. Many firms were interviewed, and the top three were invited to Chicago to make a formal presentation. The winner was Manifest Communications from Toronto. Manifest will be the strategic brain trust of the effort, and the execution of the campaign will be done by Chicago public relations gurus Edelman, who have promoted such clients as online travel giant Expedia. Manifest and Edelman also have experience with health care clients, such as the Anemia Institute for Research and Education, the Canadian Diabetes Association, and the Canadian Hearing Society.

What the Public Relations Firms Are Doing

Manifest is conducting a survey on how the public feels about chiropractic. This public opinion survey will allow us to establish a baseline on the amount of awareness people have about chiropractic and how they view chiropractic. This survey is being done very scientifically, and I have been assured that it will be over 95 percent accurate. Down the road, we can repeat this survey to see how we are doing.

Manifest is also doing a competitive analysis of the health care marketplace in the United States. This is a business analysis of health care that will look at trends, liability issues, and chiropractic competitors. It is a way for us to discover what gaps and holes there are in the health care system, and how we can fill them.

One of the most common questions I am asked is, "What's the message?" The answer is, "What the patients tell us." Instead of us deciding what we want the public to hear about chiropractic, the experts at the public relations firms are learning what the public wants to know about chiropractic. Do patients simply want pain relief? Do they want spinal rehabilitation? Lifetime care? Wellness awareness? Are they hoping to optimize health? At the time of this writing (November 2004), the public opinion surveys are not complete, but when the consumer survey and the marketplace analysis are completed, we will be able to use that information to create the message.

Step 4: The Campaign

Let me tell you a little bit about the three parts of the campaign. The national component is what I call the "excitement" piece. It will emphasize major media outlets like *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, or The Today Show. Things that are big-name, that say, "Wow." There's also a community relations component that will help provide tools and information to chiropractors in local areas, so they can promote chiropractic in their hometowns. For example: Say the doctors in Tulsa, Oklahoma, want to get involved in the campaign. We will provide materials that they can hand out to their local radio or television station. In addition, we can give them kits and handouts for the public. The hometown component is where the rubber meets the road. The neighborhood marketing done by the local doctors is what is going to make this campaign work.

The third component of the campaign is the fundraising. It is going to take millions of dollars each year to run a successful campaign. To date, Foot Levelers has paid 100 percent of the cost, but

vendors and organizations will be approached in the future about a five-year commitment to help make the campaign successful. We want every chiropractor in America to be a part of this, and we are recommending that they pledge \$100 a month on their credit card. The contributions will be fully tax-deductible. If every chiropractor gives \$100 a month and views it as a cost of doing business, we will build a substantial war chest and will be able to do a great job.

The chiropractic media is behind this campaign. Major publications have offered to support it by providing editorial and advertising space to communicate to the profession. This is critical. This campaign is not a casual event; it is a continuous, long-term flow of positive PR about chiropractic.

Step 5: The Kickoff

It won't be long until the United National Public Relations Campaign is officially started. I'd like to personally invite you to attend the Parker Seminars in Las Vegas on Jan. 13-15. At this meeting, we will officially kick off the campaign. It's going to be great, and I'd love to see you there.

Chiropractic can survive without a national public relations effort, but by supporting this campaign, we can be that much more certain that we will evolve, grow, prosper, achieve, and get the most out of our potential. There's a slogan that I have used throughout this entire process, and I want you to make it your slogan, too. It is, "We will make this work." Have a great 2005, and I hope to see you in Vegas!

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