

Beginning to "Straighten Up America"

Ron Kirk, DC

An energetic, engaging training session at the Congress of Chiropractic State Associations November 2004 convention in New Orleans marked the beginning of the implementation of the "Straighten Up America" spinal health initiative.

A host of pacesetters from the full breadth of the profession were instrumental in the development of this cutting-edge, simple and energizing set of spinal health exercises with accompanying lifestyle recommendations. Straighten Up America will also be presented at the 2005 ACC/RAC Conference in Las Vegas this coming March.

Straighten Up America began with a simple idea. People should have a short and enjoyable set of spinal health exercises to practice daily, like brushing one's teeth. The activities need to be easy to perform, for almost anyone, at anytime, anywhere.

With these concepts in mind, for the past several months, a five-person expert seed panel and a diversely comprised Delphi review panel of approximately 90 health care leaders and fitness experts have been shaping and researching a short, simple, spinal exercise module known as Straighten Up America. Delphi panelists included approximately 45 state and national chiropractic association leaders, several chiropractic college presidents, clinic directors and researchers, fitness experts, and officials of the World Health Organization. The five seed panelists were Drs. William Morgan, Meridel Gatterman, John Hyland, Peter Gratale and Ron Kirk.

A free, public service program designed to educate and empower the public, Straighten Up America is packed into three minutes of fun, engaging, easy-to-perform healthful activities. Equally useful as an ergonomic break, exercise warm-up or cool-down, the program is designed to get people of all ages and cultural backgrounds up and moving while they improve their posture and spinal health. Straighten Up America also includes a short set of healthy lifestyle recommendations congruent with the goals and objectives of Healthy People 2010, America on the Move, Steps to a Healthier U.S., and the Five-A-Day programs.

Many health and fitness leaders, including Lee Haney, past chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, have helped to develop Straighten Up America. Haney describes the program as "awesome," and that it has "much promise and vision." COCSA President Dr. Steve Simonetti considers the program "fantastic." Dr. Jean Moss, president of the Association of Chiropractic Colleges, describes the module as being "excellent, clear and easy to follow."

Our collective vision for Straighten Up America is to empower the public to take a little time every day to proactively care for their spines. Our hope is that this simple public service program will energize many millions of individuals to improve their spinal health. We know that fulfilling this vision will take hard work and extensive cooperative effort and we are committed to the task. The chiropractic profession will rise to the occasion and prosper in this service outreach.

The initial research conducted this past summer on Straighten Up America is quite promising. After five weeks of daily practice of "Straighten Up" exercises, 83 percent of study participants

reported that they had improved their posture; 78 percent reported that they had strengthened their core muscles; and 80 percent reported that they sit and stand more uprightly and that their backs were more comfortable.

Participants in our initial study ranged from college students to individuals in their 80s. We have also taught Straighten Up to young children, who are practicing the enjoyable activities enthusiastically. We hope that these beneficial spinal health habits will be learned and practiced by America's children and children around the world. Dr. Jose Carlos Martines, director of the Child and Adolescent Health and Development Cluster of the World Health Organization, shares this hope and helped to shape the program as a Delphi panel member.

Our intent is that Straighten Up America will be practiced broadly by all segments of society to help prevent the costly burden of spinal disability and to enhance the quality of people's lives. To make our vision a reality, we practitioners will first need to begin practicing the activities ourselves. Then we will be able to effectively communicate Straighten Up to our patients and our communities.

The journey of a thousand miles is beginning for us. To learn more, check out the links for the PowerPoint and PDF files, available at no charge at the COCSA Web site (www.cocsa.org) and at www.life.edu. At the Life site, click the "Wellness/Spinal Hygiene" bullet on the home page and follow either the "Spinal Hygiene" or "Journey into Wellness" track.

Straighten Up America is formatted in PowerPoint for ease of presentation to your patients, to schools, civic organizations, corporations or faith congregations, providing a great way to serve, educate and connect with your community. We are hopeful that we will set the pace for the world with this simple, enjoyable, spinal health initiative - but we must start with ourselves as doctors first by leading by example. This is our time, and it's our program to serve and empower others.

Thank you for making a difference!

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