

## Chiropractors, Public Health and the Aging Population

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There are estimates that by the year 2015, only about a decade away now, there will be more citizens in the United States over the age of 65 than ever before in our history. Scary? A wake-up call? Are the PH (public health) providers prepared? More specifically, are we chiropractors prepared?

With an increased number of "seasoned citizens" seeking chiropractic care, our practices are in an enviable position to serve the health care needs of these over-65 members of our society. We have many avenues at our disposal, due to our training, experience, and patient base. Since our profession's beginning, we have stressed the holistic approach to good health, which includes, but is not limited to: nutrition, exercise, posture, mental well-being, and preventative health care issues such as cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and osteoporosis measurements, which help safeguard our patients' health. Each of the foregoing also presents an excellent opportunity to increase our visibility in our community. Involvement in public health projects and programs also affords our profession some good public relations, because we would be stressing health care methods that are not necessarily chiropractic procedures. Thereby, we could conceivably increase our patient base as well (which by all accounts is too small now).

Most of these health care check-up services can be performed at venues such as health fairs, patient appreciation days, and during a routine in-office patient visit. If a condition such as increased blood pressure, decreased bone density, or high cholesterol level is discovered during such multiphasic public health screenings, a referral to the appropriate practitioner can be made, which helps secure our position in the public health care arena as a "member of the team."

Another beneficial side-effect can be that of referrals to us from the practitioners to whom we send our patients for co-managed care.

Public health is concerned with the public. As chiropractors, we have a unique rapport with our public, and our public is our patients. Are we prepared to serve these aging fellow Americans? I would answer emphatically, "Yes!" We have the expertise, the training, the empathy and the ability to add years to life; to help senior citizens remain independent longer and at less cost. Anita Hill (of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas fame), author of *Speaking Truth Through Power*, has been concentrating on issues of gender and aging in her work at the Brandeis Heller Graduate School, and stresses that the magnified visibility of older people will make it incumbent on service providers, from generators of media to the health care field, "to start to see things differently and start to realize that a lot of their data is just outdated. It is not a reflection of where we are today." In health professions, for example, she says, "There needs to be a greater acceptance of services provided to the elderly and a greater understanding among educators about how you can prepare young people to want to be involved in these fields."

Aging Baby Boomers will be "in a good position to be able to change the way some things are done," says Hill, "in a range of areas affecting the image of older adults, including advertising,

news and research." Boomers, she expects, will soon "start to raise questions and raise visibility in terms of age and aging."

To see the public health system in action, log on to [www.apha.org](http://www.apha.org) and view the program for the 2004 annual meeting and exhibits of the American Public Health Association (APHA), held in the nation's capital a few months ago. Once you are at the APHA home page, you should click on "online program," scroll down to the section on the left-hand side of the page, and click on Chiropractic Health Care for a review of all the activities presented by your Chiropractic Health Care Section of APHA.

Some of the topics presented at the 2004 event were:

- chiropractic in the changing health care environment;
- issues in chiropractic and public health education;
- issues in chiropractic practice and research; and
- chiropractic access, outreach and research.

There were other important topics presented and discussed at the 2004 meeting as well. I hope to see more of you at the 2005 meeting, which will be held in New Orleans this coming November.

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