

Straightening Up America

Editorial Staff

In this open letter to the chiropractic profession, Ron Kirk, MA, DC, and Stephen Simonetti, DC, elaborate on the vision and goals of the spinal health initiative known as Straighten Up America. Dr. Kirk introduced the program to readers in the Jan. 29, 2005 issue of *DC*.

Straightening Up America Empowering Health Promotion

Dear Colleagues:

At this time, the chiropractic profession, in collaboration with a broad range of other health promotion experts, is taking a bold new step forward to empower the American people toward improving their quality of life. This step is the innovative and enjoyable spinal health program called "Straighten Up America."

The vision driving Straighten Up America is very simple. We envision a time when every American will take two or three minutes every day to care for their spinal health, just as they care for their dental health. As you are aware, the need for spinal health promotion is very great, as evidenced by the many billions of dollars spent each year related to spinal disabilities. Yet, up to this time, there has not been a short, simple spinal exercise program designed to promote the public's spinal health.

To address this problem, in the summer of 2004, a five-person expert seed panel and a diversely comprised Delphi review panel began shaping a spinal health program called Straighten Up America. The Delphi panel now includes approximately 50 state, national and international chiropractic organization leaders, 17 chiropractic college presidents and program heads, 23 college clinic directors, numerous health promotion and fitness experts, and officials and researchers from the World Health Organization.

A free public service program, "Straighten Up" 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, "Straighten Up" is designed to get people of all ages and ethnicity up and moving, while they improve their posture and spinal health. The program also includes a short, cutting-edge set of healthy lifestyle recommendations, congruent with the goals and objectives of Healthy People 2010, America on the Move, Steps to a Healthier US, and the 5 A Day programs.

Though still in its infancy as a health initiative, "Straighten Up" has garnered an array of accolades from health and fitness leaders, including Lee Haney, past chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. Lee describes the program as "awesome" with "vision and much promise." In January 2005, Tommy Thompson, then-Secretary of Health and Human Services, "commended" the individuals who developed "Straighten Up America" for their "leadership in the field of spinal health."

Our hope is that this simple public service program will empower many millions of Americans to improve their spinal health. Fulfilling this vision will take hard work and an extensive cooperative effort, but we are committed to the task.

When we tested the program last summer, the results were very promising. After five weeks of daily practice of "Straighten Up" exercises, 83% of study participants reported that they had improved their posture; 78% reported that they had strengthened their core muscles; and 80% reported that they could sit and stand more upright, and that their backs were more comfortable.

Participants in our initial assessments ranged from college students to individuals in their eighties. We have also taught "Straighten Up" to young children, who are practicing the enjoyable activities enthusiastically. We hope that beneficial spinal health habits will be learned and practiced by America's children and children around the world. Dr. Jose Carlos Martines, the 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.

An exciting horizon is opening for the chiropractic profession, in which we emphasize educating the public in health promotion and wellness practices. The implementation of Straighten Up America will reposition our identity with the public for decades to come.

We are currently preparing to launch Straighten Up America as a national health initiative - with your help. In March 2005, an influential, well-connected advocacy group named Valis Associates contacted us to assist in launching Straighten Up, through obtaining congressional appropriations funding. Valis Associates is positioned to educate the White House, Congress and federal agencies, and to work to obtain federal funding, support and recognition of Straighten Up America. Among their advocacy efforts and activities, Valis Associates will conduct an intense, multifaceted fundraising campaign, organizing a Congressional Straighten Up America Day and arranging demonstrations of the program to members of Congress and staff. Valis will also organize and conduct a congressional information drop - delivering information packets to all House and Senate offices. Six months of advocacy services to obtain congressional endorsement of the program will cost \$60,000.

In order to successfully seek appropriations for the current session of Congress, advocacy must begin very soon. We need your help to receive congressional approval and funding for this innovative, enjoyable program, designed to propel the profession of chiropractic forward and position doctors of chiropractic as leaders in spinal health and wellness. We are asking larger chiropractic organizations for a donation of at least \$5,000. Any amount is welcome from individual doctors. For more information, you may call Ron Kirk, DC, facilitator of the seed and Delphi panels, at 770-426-2709; Jeffrey S. Fedorko, DC, vice-president of the Congress of Chiropractic State Associations (COCSA), at 330-494-0422; or Janet Jordan, executive director of COCSA, at 803-356-6909. Please make your check payable to Life University - Straighten Up America or COCSA - Straighten Up America.

This is the chiropractic profession's time to rise together in public service. In our cooperative efforts, Life University will continue to facilitate the seed and Delphi panels for Straighten Up America and serve as the coordinating center for the chiropractic academic community. The Congress of Chiropractic State Associations will serve as the coordinating center for chiropractic state organizations, as together we reach out to educate and serve the public in this bold and innovative initiative. Both COCSA and Life will work cooperatively with the national chiropractic organizations. Straighten Up America will be taught to all chiropractic college students and to all practitioners. The profession will then educate the public, and especially our children, in developing and habituating excellent spinal health habits.

A new day of service and health promotion is dawning for the chiropractic profession through this unique opportunity. Your support is absolutely vital to assure success for all of us. Together, we can and will make a difference.

Thank you for your commitment in this vital endeavor.

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