

## What Does Our Future Hold?

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The topic of "chiropractic identity" is currently being discussed in many venues. This is very appropriate, since it's vitally important to consider and plan for the future of our profession. Do we want to be recognized as musculoskeletal specialists, or do we actually provide patient-centered, whole-body wellness care? Should we self-limit our care to subluxations only or back pain only? Will we be better off being integrated into mainstream health care (and subject to insurance-mandated scope limitations and payment restrictions), or should we be more consumer-oriented, and provide direct-to-patient care on a cash basis (and be dependent on the depth of our patients' pockets and our marketing abilities)? What do we want to be when we mature as a profession? More critically, how should we position ourselves in the political landscape of health care economics? And what should our strategic plan be in the never-ending battle for the hearts and minds (and pocketbooks) of the public? What is the proper place for chiropractic care in the American health care system?

Recently, the Institute for Alternative Futures has undertaken an independent study of this topic.<sup>1</sup> The institute's findings can help inform our discussions regarding the upcoming opportunities and challenges, and make compelling reading for all DCs. The report notes, "Although patient satisfaction with chiropractic is high, the broader public has an indifferent or negative attitude to chiropractic." (Why is that?) The institute's report also noted that "the chiropractic profession needs greater internal unity and a shared vision of the future." (No kidding!) These futurists then make a series of recommendations for our profession to consider, if we want to extend our role within health care and achieve our preferred future. These eight recommendations (emphasis added) are:

1. Accelerate research.
2. Continue to strive for high standards of practice.
3. Develop greater integration with mainstream health care.
4. Anticipate and engage consumer-directed care.
5. Create greater unity within the profession.
6. Enhance the contributions of individual DCs to public health.
7. Prepare for the future of prevention and wellness.
8. Develop geriatric chiropractic.

So, what will it take to achieve this "preferred future" for chiropractic? How can we plan for a better future? This will require both individual efforts and group action. As individuals, chiropractors have done a great job in helping their own patients live more productive and healthier lives. This is the only reason we have survived decades of medical discrimination and attempts at elimination. But our group actions haven't been as consistently successful. There are currently several efforts underway that may yet bear some significant fruit. One of those is the Chiropractic Health Care Section of the American Public Health Association (APHA).

The members of the Chiropractic Health Care Section believe that doctors of chiropractic have an important role to play in helping to ensure the health and wellness of our communities. We want chiropractors and chiropractic patients to have a strong voice in decisions being made about the

health (and lack thereof) of Americans. And we want consumers, researchers, and other providers to become aware of the cost-effective health benefits that chiropractors can provide.

To that end, we sponsor scientific sessions at the annual meeting of the APHA. The chiropractic researchers address a broad audience, and their scientific abstracts are disseminated widely. We design and staff a booth seen and visited by thousands of health care workers every year. The booth raises awareness and engenders lots of discussions and personal interactions. And we ensure that doctors of chiropractic have seats on the Governing Council and various boards and committees of the APHA, so that our profession is at the table when discussions of the problems facing the health of the public take place. This year, 2005, we are celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the APHA Chiropractic Health Care Section. While still young, we have made a real impact on awareness and acceptance in the past decade.

As the chair of the Chiropractic Health Care Section, I invite all students and doctors of chiropractic to join with us to make it one of the strongest and most active sections of the APHA. We all have an opportunity to make a significant impact on the wellness of America and on the future of chiropractic. Just go to [www.apha.org/membership](http://www.apha.org/membership) and join or renew today!

### *Reference*

1. *The Future of Chiropractic Revisited: 2005 to 2015*. Institute for Alternative Futures, 2005.

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*Editor's note:* We published a comprehensive review of *The Future of Chiropractic Revisited* in the March 12, 2005 issue. For more information, read "Predicting the Future of Chiropractic: Institute for Alternative Futures Releases Latest Report" online at [www.chiroweb.com/archives/23/06/13.html](http://www.chiroweb.com/archives/23/06/13.html).

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