

## Terminations/Resignations Continue at Palmer

### WHAT'S BEHIND THIS DISTURBING TREND?

Editorial Staff

There have been an unprecedented number of terminations, resignations and non-reappointments in the Palmer organization since the departure of Dr. Guy Riekeman as Palmer's president less than 18 months ago. The list is long and significant:

Guy Riekeman, DC - president  
Bill Jarr - chief financial officer  
Brian McAuley, DC - vice president of academic affairs  
Kevin McCarthy, DC - vice president  
Gary Mohr - vice president of alumni development  
Randy Heuston - chief marketing officer  
Norm Bower - assistant director of marketing & communications  
Jeff Wisdo - assistant director of alumni  
Heidi Wheatley - homecoming administrator  
Bill Holmberg, DC - assistant to the president  
Chris Speak - secretary to the vice president of alumni and development  
Tim Gross, DC - clinic director  
Heather Stierwalt - student service (Palmer Florida)  
Janice Hughes, DC - co-director of The Palmer Institute  
Frank Bemis, DC - board member  
Byrd Krumholz - board member  
Roger Hulsebus - board member  
Marilyn Smith - board member

There are reportedly more names, but those listed above are the only ones confirmed thus far. Two other names that may be added to the list are:

Dr. Mack Alden - board member

Dr. Dennis Fitterer - board member

Both resigned their positions on the Palmer Board. Additionally, the entire Palmer College of Chiropractic International Alumni Association (PCCIAA) has been disassociated from the college, a move that still has many people scratching their heads.<sup>1</sup>

Attempts to interview people on the list have yielded few comments. Former employees are reluctant to go on the record, apparently fearing retribution. Some of those who have consented to be interviewed prefer to have their names withheld, but the comments that have come forth all seem to follow the same theme:

- "Is the presence of Larry Patten in the Palmer organization a positive thing for Palmer? The answer is no. In my opinion, his presence is the cause of the ever-present fear and distrust that prevails among alumni, faculty, administration, students and board members."
- "From what I've heard ... if you speak out, you do it at the risk of your own peril. Open dialog may be being practiced ... but I sense those who independently and objectively voice their opinion concerning administrative dictates may be jeopardizing their future at Palmer."

- "As history has told us ... Mr. Patten becomes a very, very polarizing focal point, not allowing freedom of thinking from the students all the way down - or all the way up to the board level, I should say. I think he has a very, very polarizing effect on campus."
- "The dictatorial atmosphere that the leadership of the board projects in its position as the governance body of the institutions, leaves the constituents in an atmosphere of fear and distrust. They fear what might happen to them and they do not feel they can trust the board or that the board trusts them. Palmer is the fountainhead of chiropractic, and anything that negatively affects Palmer ultimately affects the entire profession."
- "I think that Vicki Palmer does well in the leadership position when she's doing the leading - at this particular point in time, I don't think she's doing the leading, I think her handlers are. And I think if she would take a leadership position, you wouldn't have the problems that you have at this time."

This is not the first time that Larry Patton has been the focal point for controversy. In 1997, he was the chief financial officer for the Palmer University. On Aug. 8 of that year, Palmer's International Alumni Association gave the leadership a vote of "no confidence." This was followed by similar votes by the Palmer Student Alumni Foundation and the Palmer Student Council. A series of articles in the Aug. 24, 26, 27 and 28 issues of The Quad City Times reported on various issues that culminated in a "closed door" meeting of the Palmer Board on Aug. 29, 1997. When the board meeting was over, Larry Patten had resigned.<sup>2</sup>

Fast-forward to July 11, 2005. In an exclusive interview with Dynamic Chiropractic, Mr. Patten addressed the above comments and the situation at Palmer. When asked if there is an atmosphere of "ever-present fear and distress," Patten replied, "Do people from the outside feel that way? I don't know, I suppose maybe they do, but all I can go by is what the people internally think. And I don't feel that the people who are in positions that I interface [with] every day feel that way."

Later in the interview, Patten commented: "I think what you will find ... is that you can disagree without being destructive. When a disagreement becomes destructive, then something has to happen. Disagreement within an institution is a good thing and I think there are others [who] will tell you that I work hard to get the disagreement on the table - to talk about it, to open it up. But I do believe that once we've reached a conclusion as a group, that conclusion should go forward in a positive way. And I believe that with any organization that I work with, if somebody takes that and then starts using it in a destructive way, that's not something that is good."

"There has been a lot of change and some people may not like those changes," said Patten, in response to the obvious question of why so many long-standing Palmer staff and board members have left, particularly in the past 18 months. "Those haven't been all changes necessarily that I've come forward with and said I want. It's been a group effort and my job is to facilitate and coordinate the process, not to come up with that, because even though ... I've been around longer than most people think I was going to be, including myself ... my life is not here. I mean, I don't intend to complete my career being in a position at Palmer - that's one of the reasons I have resisted any opportunity to give me a title and put me in a position. That is not what I want to do. I have other things in my life that are really, really important that I want to get on with."

When asked when he would be leaving Palmer, Mr. Patten responded: "[It's] not a fixed date. It's not that kind of thing ... it's when the job is finished, then it will be finished and it isn't really in my hands necessarily to decide that. I have to look to the staff of the college and the board to let me know when they think my work is done."

Just prior to conducting the interview with Mr. Patten, *Dynamic Chiropractic* learned that one of

the former employees listed previously has been sued by Palmer for libel, with others getting what they felt were threatening letters. When asked about this, Mr. Patten responded:

"Well, I think it's safe to say that the board is in a position where if it just allows people to go out and say whatever they want with no retribution, whether it's true or false ... that almost gives credibility to those comments, and so I don't think there's any concern about people saying truth, but when people say things that aren't true and that borders on damaging the institution, or it does damage the institution, the institution has a responsibility to respond to that in whatever means is available to it. So, I think people need to think very carefully about what they are saying and make sure they are speaking the truth. I don't think anybody objects to the truth being told, but when it's done in a way or if it comes out in a way that damages the institution and it's not accurate, then I think that they ought to realize that there can be consequences for that sort of thing."

### *References*

1. Palmer College disassociates from alumni assoc. *Dynamic Chiropractic*, April 9, 2005: [www.chiroweb.com/archives/23/08/12.html](http://www.chiroweb.com/archives/23/08/12.html).
2. Palmer upheaval - votes of no confidence force reassessment and resignation. *Dynamic Chiropractic*, Oct. 6, 1997: [www.chiroweb.com/archives/15/21/21.html](http://www.chiroweb.com/archives/15/21/21.html).

AUGUST 2005