

Science vs. Belief

Donald M. Petersen Jr., BS, HCD(hc), FICC(h), Publisher

A number of recent polls have examined the issue of creation. Two of these polls, conducted by CBS News and CNN/USA Today/Gallup,^{1,2} asked people in the United States which of the following statements comes closest to their "views on the origin and development of human beings." The results of both polls are consistent:

- Fifty-one percent to 53 percent (depending on the poll) of those polled believe humans were "created directly by God."
- Thirty percent to 31 percent believe humans "evolved," but the evolution was "God-guided."
- Twelve percent to 15 percent believe humans "evolved," and "God had no part."

The results of these polls have many in the scientific community very concerned. They can't seem to understand how people can believe in something when science says otherwise.

While admittedly a touchy subject, I purposely chose the above example to examine issues pertaining to chiropractic. While science can attempt to discover certain facts, it doesn't have answers to some of the most important issues in our lives. (Several letters to the editor in this issue reflect similar sentiments.)

Take, for example, the following question: Does your wife/husband love you?

While most of us would confirm that they do, the divorce rate in the United States suggests our beliefs may be ill-founded over time, at least for some of us. In this case, science can do little to help us have successful marriages; it can only report on the sad state of human relationships.

In the case of chiropractic, science has barely scratched the surface of understanding what has been experienced by multiple millions of patients. We have theories and we have what happens to our patients in our offices. The goal of chiropractic research is to understand what happens when an adjustment is given and how we can provide even better care.

Over time, scientific investigation will discover a number of truths regarding chiropractic care. It probably will help us understand a great deal more about why chiropractic works the way it does.

But how do the results of research studies impact your practice? In discussing these issues with other members of the editorial staff, one person made a comment that comes to bear on these thoughts: "The problem with science is that it seems to keep changing its mind."

Certainly the existence of studies whose results contradict those of other studies does not encourage our trust in those outcomes. On the contrary, it causes many of us to embrace the studies that agree with our beliefs and dismiss as flawed those that don't.

So, why even bother with chiropractic research? The answer is obvious: We want to know more about chiropractic.

The hard part about trying to know more about something is knowing when you know enough.

While you can attempt to learn all that is currently known, you can never hope to know all there really is to know.

Even so, knowing is better than not knowing. It's better for our patients and our profession.

As a chiropractic patient for more than 50 years, I can tell you that I have much greater respect (and trust) for those DCs who have taken the time to learn more about how chiropractic can impact my health. This is also true for those who have learned about adjunctive care. If you are going to provide it, you should be an expert in it.

But at the end of the day, chiropractic is an art and a philosophy as well as a science. Our philosophy gives us a model upon which to organize our science. Whenever scientific results conflict with that model, we are challenged to rebuild our model so that it is consistent with the new information.

Sometimes we do; other times, we wait for more evidence.

There is a reason we believe what we believe when it comes to chiropractic care. It is part culture, part experience and part intuition. The results of generalizable research must bear out in our clinics or they aren't generalizable.

The important thing is that each chiropractor and student stay committed to learn as much as possible about chiropractic and wellness. Your value is in being a well-educated doctor who is knowledgeable about health and about how to apply chiropractic care to the needs of suffering humanity. That's what the world is looking for.

References

1. CBS News Poll, conducted Oct. 3-5, 2005.
2. CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup Poll, conducted Sept. 8-11, 2005.

DMP Jr.

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