

Is It Time to Join Forces?

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As we begin 2006, chiropractic will enjoy its 111th year in existence. With just over 60,000 licensed DCs in the United States, our profession is dwarfed by the medical/osteopathic profession, which boasts over 690,000 providers. (It is any wonder we have such a hard time competing?) While our profession was isolated by an "unlawful boycott,"¹ our victory over the American Medical Association provided substantial benefits that tailed off many years ago.

The health care arena continues to be very demanding. Managed care continues to take its toll, and the chiropractic profession is oftentimes ill-equipped for the task of defending itself from restricted access, limited authorization and budget cuts. To put it bluntly, we have been left outside the system for so long that we lack the money, providers and muscle required to thrive in our current health care system.

So, what is the solution?

How do we win the battles on so many fronts?

The answer may be found in our potential allies.

If we measure chiropractic's impact on the U.S. adult population, according to one of the more recent studies,² we find that in 2002, approximately 15.2 million adults (7.4% of the adult population) received chiropractic care. This is out of a total of over 72 million adults (35.1%) who utilized some form of "complementary and alternative medicine." (I don't really like this term, because chiropractic is not necessarily complementary or alternative to medicine, but these are the current terms that both professional and consumer readers will best understand.)

Needless to say, over one-third of the U.S. adult population utilized care that would be considered outside Western medical care in 2002 - but less than one in 13 sought chiropractic care that same year.

If you consider the number of U.S. providers that could be included in our list of potential allies, it looks something like this:

Acupuncturists	15,000
Massage Therapists	150,000 (estimated)
Naturopaths	5,000
Others	0,000
Total:	180,000 providers

The addition of these "other" alternative providers (we'll need to come up with a better name if we're ever going to work together) would bring our ranks up to almost 250,000 providers. While this is not even half of the medical/osteopathic numbers, it could set the stage for a voice and a presence that is much greater than what we currently enjoy.

Depending on which study you refer to, 35 percent to 42 percent of the U.S. adult population seeks various forms of alternative care (there's that awkward term again). While substantial in its nature, the alternative care world is essentially amoebic in its progression; it has no apparent direction and little leadership.

Chiropractic may not be the largest of the alternative health professions, but most would agree that it is the most developed in the United States. That being the case, the chiropractic profession could provide substantial leadership in an "alternative" health care presence in this country. We have experience and resources that would provide considerable momentum for the development of a more formalized integration of alternative care's many expressions.

We certainly have the cultural authority to begin such a process, but do we have the vision?

Should the creation of an "alternative health coalition" become a priority, given all that we are currently faced with?

While your first reaction may be negative (or even extremely negative), remember that our future can no longer be assumed. Isolationism is no longer an option. Certainly, this idea deserves careful consideration. The opportunity is not indefinite.

If you have any feeling on this topic (either way), please e-mail your comments to me at don@dcmmedia.com.

References

1. Chiropractors strike American Medical Association out in Supreme Court. *Dynamic Chiropractic*, Dec. 19, 1990;8(26).
2. Tindle HA, Davis RB, Phillips RS, Eisenberg DM. Trends in use of complementary and alternative medicine by U.S. adults: 1997-2002. *Altern Ther Health Med* 2005;11(1):42-49.

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