

Opening the Windows of Chiropractic

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One of the basic "no-no's" of public speaking or writing, experts of the platform will tell you, is talking about politics or religion. In fact, knowledgeable practice management consultants and human relations people will tell you the same thing about your practice. You don't know what your patients' attitudes are about these sensitive subjects, so to be safe and politically correct, and to not alienate anyone, avoid getting into a discussion about religion or politics. It's a lose/lose situation if you do.

Yet as I was thinking about this particular column and this festive time of the year, I could not help but reflect on what is happening in our world today, and the things that are not being said.

Well, I'm about to violate the no religion/no politics rule, which I try to practice, but in which I do not always succeed. In this article, I am going to talk about - guess what - religion and politics. (It was suggested that I don a bulletproof vest, retain a few security guards, and prepare to travel in an armored Hummer, because I know I'm entering a territory laden with bombs and booby traps! However, I hope in spite of it all, you will try to bear with me!) OK, here goes!

I was born into a typical Italian family. My parents were Catholics and not going to church regularly was not an option. I was even an altar boy and did errands for the nuns.

I have some fond memories of my family's religious and social background from my youth, but I also remember the stress, misunderstandings, prejudice and fights we had in our neighborhood with the other kids. For some strange reason, the Catholics couldn't get along with the Protestants, the Presbyterians couldn't get along with the Baptists, and none of them even tried to get along with the Jewish kids. There was always an underlying feeling of distrust and fear, no matter how friendly you were outwardly. This feeling was without any good reason, other than you perceived them as "different" - an indoctrination you learned unintentionally in your own home at an early age from well-meaning parents.

Even in my small neighborhood, which was probably typical of America, the myths and prejudicial issues that motivated disrespect were unbelievable. The Irish Catholics called the Italian Catholics "Wops"; the Italian Catholics called the Irish Catholics "Micks"; and Jewish kids were constantly being taunted with really malicious names such as "Kike." The religious disrespect among the various groups was so imbedded, you would think it was a birthright.

It took a clear-minded, gentle pope and 2,000 years to realize that religious hatred is wrong. When Pope Paul VI issued the *Nostra Aetate* in 1965, he completed the vision of Pope John XXIII. More than that, he realized religious prejudice, and the politics that surround and motivate it, are self-destructive.

The declaration of the *Nostra Aetate* describes the unity of the origin of all people. It describes the eternal questions that have dogged men since the beginning, and how the various religious traditions have tried to answer them. It rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. It regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life; those precepts and teachings

which, though differing in many aspects from the ones the church holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. It also talks about the bond that ties all people, and debunks the blame that was placed on others through the ages.

In the U.S., Pope John's reformations were taken literally; great strides have since been made between religions and religious denominations. Religious leaders meet to discuss mutual challenges. They work in unity to overcome problems. There is a sense of understanding and cooperation that benefits all, for all recognize that the basic tenets of religion are to elevate the morals, ethics and state of being of followers - not to undermine them. Even in the Middle East, the great masses of clear-thinking Muslims do not embrace hate and murder. It's not part of the religion, and certainly not part of a sane and humane person's approach to the treatment of a fellow being, whatever his or her religion, nationality or place of origin. And so, we are seeing what politics brings when it uses religion as a weapon of hate and dissension, instead of being the focal point of the good for which it was intended.

Imagine for a moment the progress and economic strength that could be attained in the world if countries partnered with each other instead of trying to destroy each other. Imagine the explosion of knowledge and production that could occur if brainpower replaced bomb power. Imagine the economic strength of differing cultures working together instead of tearing each other apart - contributing to lives, instead of shattering them - if human potential, resources and opportunities were combined.

Yes, this is the tragedy that occurs when the stupidity of prejudice and hate is the motivating force. Even the great movement for peace demonstrated so well by the peaceful approach of Gandhi and the dedication to love espoused by Mother Theresa provides evidence there is hope for humanity when prejudice and hatred are put aside.

Now, you wonder, where am I going with this critical treatise on religion and politics? What does this have to do with chiropractic? Simply this:

It took the Catholic Church 2,000 years to overcome a burden of myth that it carried. Chiropractic finds itself in the same position.

For its entire existence, more than 110 years, we have carried the burden of being at odds with the medical profession. I say "burden" because in taking this position, doctors of chiropractic have been forced to carry the weight of being labeled nonconformists (even quacks); it has caused the profession to separate and isolate itself; it has built barriers; it has forced an honorable profession to protect individuals and dogma we know are detrimental to our profession, our reputation and the welfare of the people we treat, only because the people (the entrepreneurs and evangelists) we protect are part of our so-called "family"; and we have taken a defensive approach of "circling the wagons." We have become so intensely dedicated to our "self-interests" that we have overlooked the welfare of the community. We have allowed some in our profession to take a philosophy, a science and method of treatment, and turn it into an ideology and a religion. Even worse, carried to an extreme, they have turned it into a cult.

Chiropractic is not that at least, I hope not! We are a profession, just like every other health profession, dedicated to alleviating the pain, suffering and disorders of the human being.

We do not have all of the answers, nor does any other health profession. We have no magic way about us. God does not favor us because we are chiropractors. I know of no DC who can "walk on water." Every ill cannot be treated by chiropractic. We try to do the best for our patients, but we are not alone in this quest to offer qualified health service. Sometimes we succeed; sometimes we

don't. But we try. And yes, often our patients need medical attention, just as they also need chiropractic attention. The fact is, there is a place for all disciplines, and they are all valuable, because every human being is faced with illness at some time in their lives, and there is more illness, and it is more complex than any one health discipline can ever hope to treat or cure.

Hopefully, if you get anything from this article, it will be that this is a period of enlightenment among the health care professions. We are going through a period of reformation. While there are those who still hold on to the myths and prejudices of yesterday, bridges are being built between the professions. There is an opportunity now for chiropractors to understand medicine and for medical doctors to understand chiropractic. There is opportunity for cooperation, referral and respect. There is an opportunity to create the cultural authority that has evaded us as a profession.

At every opportunity, I constantly urge every DC, be they new-generation graduates or established practitioners, to stop thinking of chiropractic as being competitive with medicine, with itself, or with any other health care profession, for that matter. There are more sick people than any single discipline can serve. Stop thinking of the practitioner down the street as being your adversary; he or she should be viewed as your ally. Stop thinking of chiropractic as a religion; think of it for what it is - a science-based art form of health care - and think about what you can reasonably do as a chiropractic practitioner.

I've made it a practice in my town to get to know the medical physicians, allied practitioners and every other DC. Believe it or not, most of them are not only friends, but also professional allies. They consult with me; they refer to me; we have patients in common; and we have similar challenges in our practices. A few years ago, I was elected to our hospital board of trustees, an experience I would hope many more DCs avail themselves to. The delivery of health care in an institution is a challenge. I've learned that interaction in most cases leads to respect, while distance breeds suspicion.

It takes effort to build bridges, and spearheading reformation is not an easy task. It takes a resistance to the status quo and a dedication to a higher cause.

When Pope John initiated what was to become the *Nostra Aetate*, he knew he was breaking a pattern of hate that became more imbedded with every generation of blind believers. He knew the power of many pundits depended on prejudices. And he knew not all would readily accept rapprochement after 2,000 years of using intolerance and ignorance as a political tool to force adherence. But he did what he felt was right for mankind - and his church.

I truly believe the future of chiropractic depends on cooperation. The health system is in a state of change, as are the health habits of both the people we serve and those we would like to serve. Don't promise miracles; we are not gods - just human beings with outstanding skills and hopefully a dedication to the good that is stated in every line of the Chiropractic Oath we have taken.

Chiropractic can no longer be outside the mainstream. We can no longer expend our resources on trying to prove we are right and medical science is wrong. We can no longer dislike them because they are different, or because they do not agree with us on every scientific or procedural issue - and neither can they!

You and I know, if we will admit it, that there is no right or wrong. We are both right if what we contribute to society are greater awareness and service for the betterment of health. That is all that counts.

As I see it, this is a time for rapprochement in our relations with the medical profession. Being

realistic, I don't visualize it as taking the form of some great pact struck by the political forces of the AMA and the various trade groups currently representing a minority of chiropractic practitioners. If we wait for the politicians, it may never happen. But I do see it being done on a grassroots level - doctor with doctor, discipline with discipline. I see a wave of cooperation taking place and growing when doctors get to know each other on a person-to-person basis. That's what will build respect, cooperation, confidence, and your practice; and it is what will ensure that patients get the kind of comprehensive health care support to which they are entitled.

During this holiday season, perhaps we can forget the dogmas, the old arguments, the old animosities, the old feelings of inadequacy and prejudice, and the old tendencies to isolate ourselves. Step up and hold out your hand to the colleague you have not taken the time to meet - a medical counterpart in your community, even if he or she has been a little slow to respond. It has to start somewhere.

Modern health care has to be a group effort. Every DC needs to get out there and become part of the community. Get to know physicians of all disciplines in your area.

While the history, principles, tenets and methods of each profession may be different, the underlying motive of each is the same: to get people well. Bringing the cultures and resources together, as different and unique as they may and should be, can only serve to broaden the horizon, and will make them stronger, better and more effective.

Wise clergy today preach love, understanding and cooperation. It is my hope that the new leaders of our generation also will realize that their common cause overshadows politics or self-interests, and that they will have the good sense and wisdom to work shoulder to shoulder as partners, not adversaries, with their counterparts in other professions.

If I have offended anyone by discussing politics or religion, I apologize. But at the same time, I can't help but paraphrase Pope John XXIII, who said, "I want to throw open the windows of the Church so that we can see out and the people can see in."

Likewise, after 100 years of isolation, I would like to see us throw open the windows of the chiropractic profession, so we can see out and the world can see in. Let the transparency transform the profession from one of isolation to one of integration.

The grassroots of this profession is our hope for the future, and the grassroots can make it happen, if it has the desire. I hope each and every DC will review this article in the spirit of the season and realize that it is the individual practitioner who can make the difference in whether chiropractic merely survives or thrives; whether we advance or retreat, whether we embrace the changes being demanded of every health care profession, or whether we respond with resistance.

During this time of the year, reflection often is prompted by the spirit of the season. I hope this reflection causes many who do not want to "get involved" to come forward with support (moral, spiritual, financial, emotional) for those who are working to advance the profession. Best wishes to you during this holiday season.

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