

Why I'm Still Around

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO CREATE LIFETIME CHIROPRACTIC ASSISTANTS AND PATIENTS

Lisa Bilodeau, CA

I am quite often asked why I dedicated my life to chiropractic. Twenty-five years ago, I applied for a job as a "receptionist" in a chiropractic office. I had no idea what a chiropractor was or even how to pronounce the word "chiropractic." I would like to point out that my father was a surgeon and my mother a social worker at UC San Francisco, and my entire background up to that point was one of allopathic medicine.

During the interview process with seven team members, one of the doctors interviewing me, Dr. Alwyn Sykes, picked up a model of several spinal vertebra that was sitting on the desk in the consultation room. He explained to me what a vertebral subluxation was, what subluxations caused, and the role of chiropractic in correcting vertebral subluxations, restoring health and quality of life. I literally got goosebumps and knew deep inside that this was the ultimate form of health care. He also told me chiropractors not only helped patients with pain, but also provided preventative care once the pain was gone. He explained that with regular chiropractic adjustments, exercises, nutrition, rest and a positive mental attitude, patients could remain pain-free for longer periods of time. And guess what? The job title was "chiropractic assistant," not receptionist and it was a career, not just a job.

So, when my sister recently told me that my niece was home with a high fever, the first words out of my mouth were, "Take her to your chiropractor! Although he can't cure fevers, he can find the cause of the problem, adjust the subluxated vertebra and allow my body to heal faster." Her response was that she was going to get her niece antibiotics. The first thought that came to my mind was, "What did her chiropractor tell her that chiropractors do?" because she apparently only goes to her chiropractor when she has back pain and needs a "massage." Now, in all fairness to her chiropractor, he mostly likely told her not to wait until she was in pain, and that he could assist with other problems caused by vertebral subluxations.

In California, where I live, many doctors of chiropractic who once had thriving workers' compensation practices are struggling to keep their doors open due to work comp reform. I believe this may partially be due to the fact that patients, whether or not they are being treated for work-related injuries, have no idea of the definition of vertebral subluxation complex or its relationship to disease. I also feel that if they completely understood its meaning and the chiropractor's role in the restoration of health, and then passed this information on to family, friends and co-workers, so many more people would be treated for non-work-related injuries. This would help reduce the chiropractors' struggle because of dwindling workers' comp cases, and in turn, so many more people would be getting healthy!

On the other hand, I have many clients who continue to have thriving practices in California and who were not fazed by workers' compensation reform. Why? They do an excellent job of educating their patients about the vertebral subluxation complex and the problems associated with it. They spend a great deal of time in the office educating their patients. Here are some examples of ways they educate their patients; hopefully, you can do so, too.

- During the first couple of visits, show videos explaining what chiropractic is, what the chiropractor does, what to expect, and what you can do to assist in the healing process.
- Have charts showing the nervous system and what happens when there is interference (subluxation).
- Have pamphlets and educational literature explaining how chiropractic can help with these conditions. I recently heard Sherry Hodge telling a group of CAs that when she worked for Charlie Ward, patients were reluctant to take brochures placed in the reception area. This made perfect sense; people don't want the world to know about their health problems. They moved the racks into the bathrooms and found that people starting taking the brochures.
- Conduct health care classes to educate your patients, their families and friends about what chiropractic is and what it can do, as well as the role patients play in obtaining better health and what they can do to maintain it. Remember that the chiropractic adjustment is just one part in obtaining and maintaining optimum health. Patients must be proactive and do their part: get plenty of rest, practice good nutritional habits, exercise and have a positive mental attitude.
- Send out newsletters to your patients.
- Have a white board in the reception area with information about a condition of the month.
- Call when a patient misses an appointment and get them rescheduled immediately.
- Get patient testimonials that say what brought the patient to the office, what else they did before trying chiropractic, and the wonderful results they have experienced as a result of chiropractic care. Have these testimonials mounted and framed and placed throughout the office. Remember that due to HIPAA, patients must give you written permission to do so post this information.
- When you are not in the office, be sure your outgoing message gives the caller a phone number to call in case of a chiropractic emergency.
- Explain that as a chiropractor, your purpose is not only to find and correct the subluxations to the best of your ability, but also to do whatever your can to keep patients well for life.
- When adjusting patients, tell them the specific conditions that result when the vertebra you are adjusting is subluxated.

In a recent article in the May 8, 2006 issue of *Dynamic Chiropractic* titled "Chiropractic and Dental Floss," Brian Jensen, DC, pointed out that dentists have educated their patients to brush, floss and have regular checkups to avoid possible dental problems. We should be doing the same. When one of my patients says, "I will call you when it hurts," I tell them that if they waited until their teeth hurt, they would most likely have dental problems. I also tell them that our goal is similar to their dentist, which is to prevent their pain whenever possible, and that regular checkups can aid in the prevention of problems.

As many of you know, the turnover rate of chiropractic assistants is huge. Once again, I feel that if they really understood, lived and practiced the chiropractic principles, the turnover rate would decrease. Take the time to educate all new CAs, just as you would your patients. Encourage them, their families and their friends to make chiropractic care a regular part of their routine.

By now you have probably guessed that I have not been a chiropractic assistant for more than 25 years just because I love dealing with insurance companies. I have stayed because I know that chiropractic is the ultimate form of health care. It is about the prevention of disease and promotion of wellness without the use of drugs or surgery. That does not mean there are not times when drugs or surgery are necessary, but it does mean we do whatever possible to prevent it. Most importantly, I love to see patients who have tried just about everything get well. They become part of our family, and we share in their joy and good health.

In closing, I would like to remind you that it was not long ago that chiropractors were going to jail for practicing chiropractic. Dr. W.F. Stiers (a chiropractor who did go to jail in 1923) stated in the

Dec. 3, 1993 issue of *Dynamic Chiropractic*, "I feel that when a chiropractor goes to jail for the principle for which we were fighting, he has paid the supreme price for the right of the sick to get well by the doctor of their choice. Without reflection on anyone, I wonder how many chiropractors in Ohio today would have the guts to go to jail so that chiropractic might survive."

Chiropractic is a way of life for me. What does it mean to you? Would you be willing to risk jail for your profession? Are you willing to have long discussions with nonbelievers? (Family members can be the biggest challenge.) Are you willing to lose a patient because they just don't get it or want it?

"Only those who have dared to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly."

- Anonymous

JULY 2006