

## Looking Forward to Chiropractic's Future

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Before I look forward to the next 25 years of chiropractic and health care, let's look back to 1988, which was truly a year to remember in chiropractic. That year provided us an opportunity to challenge the future, learn from the past and remember those who left our ranks.

The signing of the ACA contract with *Reader's Digest* provided the first-ever true national exposure of this profession to the general reading public. Chiropractic's inclusion was a move forward and a statement that we were here to stay. I remember the pride and excitement I felt as I looked through the pages of the issue of *Reader's Digest* that carried *our* message.

The printing of the AMA injunction was another step forward for chiropractic. The admission of wrongdoing in black and white served to put the members of the AMA who had continued to challenge and express disdain for the chiropractic profession on notice that their previous methods were wrong and that it was time for a change in the way the chiropractic profession should be treated.

With great anticipation and expectation, the chiropractic community watched and listened to discussions between the two national associations regarding merger. This was the year that the most serious attempt was made to merge this profession. The presidents of the ICA and ACA met, discussions ensued and joint press releases were issued to the profession. The headlines in February 1988 were positive and exciting. But unfortunately, by August, the headlines announced, "Merger Is Dead."

And in 1988, the California Medical Association and the California Physical Therapy Association declared open war on chiropractic - certainly an admission of something we had known for a long time.

To be counted among the losses in 1988 was Dr. Donald Petersen Sr., founder of *Dynamic Chiropractic*. Dr. Petersen was an uncompromising individual who vehemently defended his positions. Even for those of us who had the opportunity to challenge Dr. Petersen on one of those positions, it was clear that his stance came from the heart and his love of the chiropractic profession. He left behind a legacy that has continued to be the voice of chiropractic over the past two decades.

After a discussion of the past, one must look to the present and future of this profession. Many attempts have been made since 1988 to launch a successful national public relations campaign, but they all have relied on the profession for financial support. Other professions have vendor mentors (such as pharmaceutical companies) who provide vast financial support for public relation programs.

Individually, members of this profession have spent millions of dollars on Yellow Pages and other types of ads. One can only wonder if these individuals are reaping rewards that an entire profession could reap if that money were used to support a public relations campaign. Looking toward the future, I would hope that we would learn from groups such as the California Dental

Association, whose vast public relations program carried the dental profession through the managed - care times, with dental offices enjoying a continuing influx of patients without the benefit of insurance.

Our schools are enjoying increasing enrollment. The challenge for those of us currently in practice will be to provide a practice environment that is friendly, welcoming and conducive to new practitioners. Succession is necessary in any profession that wishes to survive. The need for mentors will be even more necessary with our increasing involvement in the world of managed care and insurance reimbursement.

One of the challenges facing chiropractic and other health-related professions will be the shrinking dollar in the area of insurance reimbursement. The need to stand united and claim our rightful share of reimbursement will test the fiber of the individual practitioner and the profession. Without a united front, we may well continue to "come up short."

I also feel the future chiropractic practice will integrate more with other health care providers to provide a full-scope approach to patient care. This is already being seen in many practices now. This integrated approach will not only facilitate better patient care, but also will enable the chiropractic practitioner to be part of the larger health care community.

If I had one wish for the next 20 years, it would be for something that my 91-year-old father, who graduated from Palmer in 1950 and continues to wonder at the powers and might of this profession, shared with me a number of years ago. When he joined me in the small town in which I continue to practice, there were approximately 12 chiropractors. Several of them told him not to practice here - too many chiropractors for the area. His response: "It looks like you are all doing well, so it must be a chiropractic community." Sure enough, he was right, and I have learned to welcome new chiropractors to this community, with the hope that it will remain a chiropractic community and hopefully become a chiropractic world.

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