

## Public Health: The Next Step in Integrative Chiropractic, Part 1

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I'm a chiropractor, and sometimes I have been called a "quack" by people who don't know me very well - and who also aren't very polite!

I've also had the opposite experience: Upon hearing that I was a chiropractor, people spontaneously have told me about how they or someone they know was helped by a chiropractor. I'm sure you have all had similar experiences.

What's interesting to me is that I used to be on the other side of this situation. I grew up with literally no awareness of chiropractic. The first time I ever went to a chiropractor was in my 20s. My wife experienced a great deal of back pain after giving birth to our first child. Her parents had taken her to chiropractors as a child in Canada, so when she started suffering severe postpartum back pain, she reflexively picked a chiropractor out of the phonebook and off we went.

Nothing could have prepared me for my first exposure to chiropractic, especially with this particular chiropractor. When we walked into the office, I was shocked by the number of wares for sale, including items I knew were associated with multilevel marketing companies. No physician I had ever visited in my life sold goods out of their office - especially not Tahitian noni juice! This chiropractor had posters all over the walls listing ailments that could be cured by products he sold. His interpersonal skills were negligible. I was stunned - this was chiropractic? And then he adjusted my wife's back and her pain went away.

I had a difficult time reconciling my perception of the first chiropractor I ever met as a "huckster" with the fact that my wife's pain was gone. Grateful as I was, I probably still would never have gone back to a chiropractor. However, fate struck again! My wife experienced another bout of acute low back pain. We went to a different chiropractor, and his office and demeanor were completely professional. I was quite at ease. However, chiropractors still had no cultural authority with me. When he told my wife her pain could be attributed to her psoas muscle, I was secretly thinking: "Psoas muscle? Who has ever heard of a psoas muscle? He's making this up." I had never heard of the psoas muscle, and because of my perception of chiropractic, I tended to assume the chiropractor was making it up rather than believing him. Yet he treated my wife twice, and her pain completely went away. I had some more thinking to do.

Now, only a few years later, I'm the chiropractor helping people with their back pain - and explaining about the psoas. Although I "came around," the chiropractic perception problem is clearly alive and well. Those who have no personal experience with chiropractic often are more likely to be negatively disposed to chiropractic than to be neutral, just like I was. This has to change.

Earlier, I noted that I have been both reviled and praised because I am a chiropractor, regardless of my own personal attributes. People react to me, in part, according to their perception of the profession - just as I used to do. Fortunately, those general perceptions can improve. One of the keys to enhancing the cultural authority of the chiropractic profession is by embracing public

health principles and practice. The ideas that everyone matters, prevention comes first and optimizing health is necessary for the good of all are all public health concepts chiropractors already hold close in their own value systems.

The largest public health association in the world, the American Public Health Association (APHA), is also the largest interdisciplinary "level playing field" for chiropractors. Chiropractors have full status within this association. We have our own official section (Chiropractic Health Care) and budget, we present our own original research at the APHA Annual Meeting, and we associate with health care workers from all backgrounds who share our interest in prevention and community health.

Come join the team! As chiropractors join integrative associations such as the APHA and "pitch in," our interest in health and wellness and our cooperative spirit become clear to others. The fact that we are willing to join with other like-minded practitioners - without old rivalries and prejudices - has great potential to make a difference. Come join APHA and discover, as have hundreds of other chiropractors, that public health holds the key not only to the health of communities and nations, but also to improve the public perception of our profession.

Chiropractic and public health both have great concern for "wellness." Both have much to offer one another. (The public health definition of wellness and how it applies to chiropractic will have to wait for part 2 of this article.) Meanwhile, take a few moments now and log in to [www.apha.org](http://www.apha.org) and click "join" (or click [here](#) for an application). Don't forget to select the Chiropractic Health Care section as your primary section affiliation. You've been thinking about joining for a while - now's the time.

The APHA Annual Meeting will be in San Diego, Oct. 25-30, 2008. An estimated 15,000 of the top leaders in health and government are expected to attend. It will be the largest public health gathering in the world, and as an APHA member, you can be a part of it. Participate in something that has the potential to make a difference and change the perception of chiropractic once and for all.

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