

PTs Attempt to Make Chiropractic Their Own

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With almost 190 million people, there are more people in Brazil than in all of the other South American countries combined. Unfortunately, the chiropractic profession is not well-established in South America. Only a handful of countries enjoy any kind of legislation. Brazil is not one of them.

While chiropractic is not regulated in Brazil, physiotherapy is: PTs have the right to develop and create specialties through their national regulatory body, the Council of Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists (COFFITO).

Since 2001, the Brazilian Chiropractors' Association (ABQ) has campaigned for chiropractic legislation. Draft legislation has been prepared and has received first reading in the legislature (Camara). In December 2007, chiropractic legislation was approved by the Commission on Constitution and Justice. It must still be approved by several other commissions before it can return to the Camara for a final vote. A major effort is now required to have the law passed by the Camara and then the Senate, with strong opposition from the COFFITO.

The COFFITO, in response to the ABQ's campaign, claims chiropractic is a specialty of PT. It supports weekend postgraduate courses for PTs to give them a chiropractic certificate. Graduates are forming a Brazilian Physical Therapists Chiropractic Association (ABRAFIQ) to try to formalize chiropractic as a specialty of PT before separate chiropractic legislation can be passed.

If this succeeds in Brazil, it is likely to spread to other Latin American countries. A PT leader in Chile already is planning a chiropractic course. This will encourage PTs in other countries without chiropractic legislation. (This problem also may be arising in Spain, Portugal and Egypt.)

Unfortunately, the ABQ, with only 125 members, most of whom are new graduates, has few financial resources. As a result, members have formed a separate and autonomous Legislative Commission coordinated by Dr. Sira Borges, former president of ABQ. This has received funding from individual chiropractors and the two chiropractic schools in Brazil. With funding, it has run a strong campaign, getting the approval of the Commission on Constitution and Justice in December despite strong COFFITO opposition.

A volunteer chiropractor, Dr. Evergisto Lopes Souto, has moved to Brasilia, the capital, to head the ongoing campaign. However, the AQB and the Legislative Commission already are in debt and urgently need international help.

In addition to the previously mentioned efforts, last month the lawyer and consultants retained by the ABQ persuaded prosecutors at the Ministerio Publico, a government watchdog agency for issues of public interest and safety, to take legal proceedings against the PT leaders promoting the totally inadequate postgraduate chiropractic courses for PTs on the grounds of misrepresentation and public safety.

This is a war that could potentially impact the fate of chiropractic for much of South America. The concussion of chiropractic becoming a physiotherapy specialty would certainly taint the public's perception of our profession worldwide.

The battle our Brazilian colleagues are facing is pivotal. They need our help now. To make a donation, see the article on the front page of this issue. Our future doctors and patients thank you.

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