

Merger Trend Hits Oregon

AS MORE STATES CHOOSE UNITY, WILL NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS STAND AND TAKE NOTICE?

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The two chiropractic associations in Oregon have voted to merge,¹ continuing the nationwide trend within states toward representation by a single membership organization. The merger of the Chiropractic Association of Oregon (CAO) and the Oregon Doctors of Chiropractic (ODOC) brings together more than 1,500 DCs as members of the newly formed Oregon Chiropractic Association (OCA).

"We are excited to have this unity in our profession," said Robert Taylor, DC, former president of the ODOC, who will now serve as co-president of the unified organization along with Donald Ferrante, DC, former CAO president. "We are proud of where we have been, but we see a bright future for chiropractic in Oregon."

"By combining financial and volunteer services into one group, we will be able to leverage the successes we have had as independent associations," added Dr. Ferrante. "Patient care and professional development of chiropractors will benefit."

OCA Board Formed; First Convention Scheduled

In addition to Drs. Taylor and Ferrante, the inaugural OCA Board features board members from both previous organizations, including David Duemling, DC (vice president), Jennifer Pitcairn, DC (treasurer) and Michael Miller, DC (secretary), who join the co-presidents on the executive committee. OCA officers include Steve DeShaw, DC; Cheryl Gross, DC; Dan Miller, DC; Robert Ramsey, DC; Jason Kehr, DC; Kevin Holzapfel, DC; John Schmidt, DC; Ann Durrant, DC; and Peter Lind, DC.

The OCA held its first official event, Chiropractic Day, at the Oregon Capitol in mid-January and will bring association members, nonmembers and guests together at the first annual OCA Winter Convention Feb. 27-March 1. [The OCA makes its overall mission clear in an official statement on its newly established Web site:](#)²

"The Oregon Chiropractic Association is an organization for doctors by doctors. We are dedicated to the service of our members, our profession, and the enhancement to the quality of life for our patients. We are committed to the education of our members, our patients, other healthcare professionals, and the public at large. ... We believe that all patients should have direct access to chiropractic care. We embrace chiropractic as a unique healthcare discipline that leads the field of health and wellness, one that focuses on the restoration of health by promoting the innate recuperative powers of the human body, without the use of drugs or surgery. We believe that chiropractic should maintain its unique identity while working cooperatively with other health care disciplines. We honor the diversity and heritage that is chiropractic, and will strive to promote unity without uniformity within our profession. The Oregon Chiropractic Association will support each member and protect their practice rights as well as our profession's regional autonomy."

Could State Unity Lead to National Unity?

With the Oregon merger announcement, chiropractors in more than 40 states are now represented by a single state association/society, according to the Congress on Chiropractic State Associations (COCSA). The trend toward unification certainly seems to be on the rise, with successful mergers in [Colorado](#) and [Michigan](#) in the past two-plus years alone,^{3,4} and the two membership organizations in [Virginia](#) involved in ongoing cooperative efforts that suggest merger is a distinct possibility in the near future.⁵

It will be interesting to see if this trend continues and what effect, if any, it will have on the two major national membership organizations, the ACA and the ICA, which remain separate and distinct entities to this day, despite merger efforts in the 1980s and again in 2007. In the most recent instance, [COCSA passed a "Resolution on National Unity" on March 10, 2007, essentially demanding that the ACA and ICA agree to "set aside their philosophical and political differences and begin the process of merger."](#)⁶

In an interview with *DC* following passage of that resolution, COCSA President Jerry DeGrado, DC, explained the potential benefits of a single national voice representing the chiropractic profession:

"If you look at the state associations through COCSA, you've got 58 state associations and around 30,000 doctors who are members of those state associations. Now, you are going to get some crossover between the 8,400 [estimated combined members of the ACA and ICA at that time] and the 30,000. Together, that's more than half the profession working toward one goal. Believe me, there are a lot of doctors who I believe are sitting there in their offices right now waiting to join the new national organization, who are tired of the same old egos. They want to see things get done. They want to see us have a unified voice on Capitol Hill."⁶

The unity resolution urged the two organizations to "begin immediate action toward merger with a target completion date of January 1, 2010," and led to correspondence between then-ACA President Richard Brassard, DC, and current ICA President John Maltby, DC. [The ACA board of governors responded to the COCSA merger demand on May 1, 2007, releasing a statement inviting the ICA to begin discussions:](#) "We invite our colleagues at ICA to meet with us to begin the discussions that will hopefully lead to a stronger and more powerful chiropractic profession."⁷ Dr. Brassard also wrote a letter to Dr. Maltby, recommending that a merger discussion begin immediately.

[However, the ICA board of directors and representatives, meeting April 27-28, 2007, in Washington, D.C., for their scheduled 81st Annual Meeting, had already unanimously adopted the following statement on the merger issue:](#)⁸

"Historically, there have been four attempts to force a merger of the ICA with another national chiropractic association. Each of these attempts resulted in defeat of the proposal, and a decline in membership for both associations involved. In all these attempts, an organizational merger was attempted without a basic understanding of the very uniqueness that necessitates the various organizations. The ICA has no desire at present to repeat these historical failures by pursuing the same course.

"There are basic chiropractic philosophical tenets that ICA holds supreme, and are not subject to compromise. It is the separate and clear voice of the ICA that has created a system of checks and balances in our profession. Over the past several decades it has been painfully obvious that this

separate voice has prevented the profession from drifting in a direction that ICA views as clearly in violation of our philosophical tenets, as well as detrimental to our profession and the unique contribution we offer the public.

"Although we view the 'demand' from one organization upon another to be a curious course of action, we can appreciate the desire to further the profession of chiropractic. ICA shares these desires but does not agree on the course of action being proposed. ICA continues to pledge cooperative effort in those areas where a common voice can speak on issues. However, on those issues where a separate voice is needed, ICA will continue to express that voice."

Following adoption of that statement, Dr. Maltby emphasized that the ICA "has communicated with the president of the [ACA], reiterating ICA's willingness to cooperate on issues of common concern, for the greater good of the profession, especially in the realm of legislation and public policy."

The Chiropractic Summit: Large-Scale Professional Cooperation

While the national chiropractic associations may not be any closer to merger, cooperation between the ACA, ICA and other major professional organizations appears to be on a definite upswing. Case in point: [The ongoing Chiropractic Summit meetings, the latest of which took place in Orlando in August 2008.](#)⁹ That meeting brought together 40 national and international chiropractic leaders from 32 organizations, including the ACA, ICA, COCSA and the Association of Chiropractic Colleges, to discuss two key issues of vital importance to the profession: the future of the Medicare program and prospects for national health care reform.

Washington, D.C. hosted the first Chiropractic Summit, attended by representatives from 13 chiropractic organizations in September 2007. The second summit meeting took place at the Parker Seminar in Las Vegas in February 2008 and featured representatives of 24 chiropractic organizations. As of press time, a fourth Chiropractic Summit was scheduled for January 2009 at Parker Las Vegas.

References

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