



CHIROPRACTIC (GENERAL)

Looking Back, Looking Forward With Dr. Gerry Clum

LIFE WEST'S FIRST AND ONLY PRESIDENT IS STEPPING DOWN IN JANUARY, BUT HIS CHIROPRACTIC CAREER ISN'T OVER - FAR FROM IT.

Editorial Staff

Spend a few moments with [Dr. Gerry Clum](#) and you'll discover a man whose gentle demeanor and perpetual modesty belie his impressive accomplishments within the profession - accomplishments that span more than three decades and counting: a founding member and former president of the Association of Chiropractic Colleges; a founding board member and former president of the [World Federation of Chiropractic](#); a member of the board of directors of the Council on Chiropractic Education; a longtime board member of the International Chiropractors Association; a board and executive committee member of the Foundation for Chiropractic Progress - and of course, president of Life Chiropractic College West for 30 years. (By the way, he was also *Dynamic Chiropractic's* 1992 [Person of the Year](#).)

Spend a few moments with Dr. Gerry Clum and you'll understand that while Life West's first and only president, who has announced that he will step down in January 2011, may be finishing one historic chapter in his chiropractic career, he has many more left to write. In this exclusive interview, Dr. Clum offers insight into how Life West, chiropractic education and the profession as a whole have grown during the past 30 years, and the challenges - and opportunities - doctors of chiropractic and soon-to-be doctors of chiropractic face now and in the future.



Let's look back first: What do you see as the most important things that have happened in this profession while you have been at the helm of Life West? I would say the fact that all of chiropractic education is now functioning in the U.S. under one single accrediting agency; the

completion of the *Wilk* suit; the ratcheting down of the rhetoric between the national associations and the corresponding emergence of a stronger sense of collegiality in that environment; the development of the research infrastructure across the profession; the overall growth in the quality of the facilities and the faculties of chiropractic education; and a maturation of the profession in general.

Looking forward, what are the biggest challenges coming up? More of the same: the need for more maturity, the need for more collaboration and collegiality, the need for more research, the need for more and higher competencies and capacities within the educational and practice communities ... that's the obvious stuff. Realistically, the number-one issue on the table is that chiropractic is poised to move out of "boutique" status in health care and into player status on a national stage with the unfolding of health care reform; and the opportunity [exists] for the profession to demonstrate clinical and cost-effectiveness on a fair and even basis in the marketplace.

I personally think the market and the future will be neutral as far as providers go; it will care about performance in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, and where those are established in the strongest fashion is where the effort, the activity and the funding will follow.

If you were to warn our profession about dangers we are currently facing or could face in the near future, what would you warn us about? Premature cognitive commitments: making decisions based on erroneous assumptions of the moment. For example, I think there are groups across the profession that see the addition of drug therapy to the practice of chiropractic as the solution to the moment, and quite honestly, I think it's a very bad move, but in general ... it's making a determination and basing a long-term strategy on a short-term circumstance. I would suggest the profession needs to be cautious if it looks at changing its paradigm and direction. The short-term response may be the exact opposite of what the long-term response needs to be. So, I think the caution would be to move judiciously but slowly, and with more forethought than we've ever had before.

What do you feel is your greatest accomplishment over these 30 years? Keeping my job [laughs]. On a personal level, I've tried to function with an orientation to a given perspective on chiropractic ... an admittedly conservative orientation to the practice style of chiropractic ... and at the same time [try not to] negate someone else or some other strategy in the process of trying to advance what I thought was best. I'd like to think I have emerged 30 years down the road with a degree of respect on both sides of the aisle within the profession; and if that's in fact the case, on a personal level, I would consider that an accomplishment I would be proud of.

On a professional level, bringing 4,000-plus chiropractors into the world through Life Chiropractic College West, developing a faculty, a facility and a program that has contributed to the greater good of the profession and the public at large, and participating in the dialogue along the way has been something that I feel gratified about.

I've [also] had the good fortune to be a founding member of the Association of Chiropractic Colleges; a founding member of the World Federation of Chiropractic; and be involved in the infrastructure of the profession through almost 20 years on the board of the ICA, 30 years on the board of the [ACC], 20 years on the board of the [WFC], 18-plus years on the board of the CCE ... and those types of activities are certainly things that I'm grateful for.

I'm thankful to have participated as a member of the steering committee as a conferee and then as chairman of the post-conference publication committee of [the Mercy document](#). (I know that may come as a shock to some my colleagues on the conservative side of the aisle, but I think that was an important contribution and an important stepping stone along the way.)

To have served as one of the co-chairs of the [WFC] consultation on the identity of the profession was also an important contribution. And to have served as the chair of the [ACC] committee that addressed the status of cervical spine adjusting and vertebral artery issues in chiropractic education and the profession at large, I think was a contribution I will be very proud of in the fullness of time.

Being the first president of a chiropractic college gives you a certain amount of notoriety, and obviously that first 30 years were very definitive for the college. How has having Gerry Clum at the helm defined what Life West has become? For better or worse, emerging institutions, whether a corporation or a college or a nonprofit or an athletic activity - when you bring those things from the ground up, they absorb your personality and your ethic, and the spirit with which you do business and conduct your life gets transmitted into that organization, one way or another. Whether that's a good thing or a bad thing is for time to tell. That's part of it. The other part of it is just the opposite of that: those things get translated into the fabric of the institution.

One of the great advantages of being involved early on and staying on is going through the build phase and then going through the sustenance phase and then going through the growth maturation phase; and hopefully you don't contribute the same thing three times over, but you make three different contributions at each of the three levels - and I'd like to think that as I grew up (I started out as president of Life West when I was 28 years old), the institution grew up with me and I grew up with the institution. We learned an awful lot together, and hopefully we learned to do more things right than wrong along the way.

To say that the institution doesn't have to some degree my fingerprint or touch of my DNA would be wrong, but to say that is the sum and substance of the institution would be equally wrong. I think over time my contribution lessened in terms of the fabric ... with anything as it gets into a more mature phase, it's influenced less and less by day-to-day activities; and I think that's what's happened over the last 10 years at the college. That's not a good or bad thing; that's just the way it is.

If there isn't already, some day, not too far away, there will be a statue or a plaque or something on campus that recognizes you as the first president, and there will likely be a paragraph (or maybe two or three or 10) that encapsulates who you are. If you could write those paragraphs, what would they say and what would you like them to say to the students 10 years from now who never got to meet you? I think they would say on a personal level, he worked hard for what he believed in, tried to do right by people and tried to live out the ethic and the perspective that he learned from Dr. Williams as a young man that was embodied in the concept of lasting purpose; of loving, serving and giving out of a sense of abundance. If I have been truthful and faithful to that, then I'll be very thankful and very grateful for the opportunity to play on this stage for this time.

What does the immediate future hold for Gerry Clum? Where do you see yourself going next? Well, I'm certainly not retiring from the profession. I'm changing the nature of my involvement with the profession and certainly with Life West. I'm hoping to, as all the pop psychology folks talk about, reinvent myself at this point in my career. There are a lot of things that I currently do because I have to, because of my position; I'd like to stop doing some of those [things] and do some of the things I'd like to do.

I'd like to write a good bit; I'd like to read a novel (because I want to and will finally have the time). I look forward to greater involvement in a narrower range of activities in the profession that will allow me the chance to drill down and perhaps use some of the things I've learned over the last 30 years for a more focused, stronger return. If the comparison isn't too terribly grandiose, I look at someone like Senator George Mitchell or Jimmy Carter - people who had wonderful careers in the

Senate and as president and then went on to have another career after that time where they did perhaps even more than they did in their first career. If that were to be my fate and good fortune, I would consider myself most blessed.

If you could shake hands with every doctor of chiropractic currently in practice and speak to them regarding what's going on with their lives and where chiropractic is in the course of its overall history, what would you say? Never, never, never underestimate the power of an adjustment. With all the things that come and go, with all the insurance and all the forms and way things are expressed and the things that come in and out of fashion in practice and procedures and practices and you name it, the one constant for all time in chiropractic has been the adjustment, the power of the adjustment, and I think the one thing we lose sight of more often than not is the power in that adjustment.

I'm not saying you can be a bad businessperson and get by because you're a good adjuster; I'm not saying you don't have to pay attention to anything other than the adjustment; there's obviously a wide range of activities a clinician needs to be involved in - but the absolute, fundamental, bottom-line deal is the adjustment. And to the degree that we'll come back into focus [regarding] the power of that, realize its implications in the broadest context and do the things that allow that to be manifested more fully, I think we'll assure the future of the profession in that regard.

The more we drift away from the appreciation of the contribution we as chiropractors make to the health and well-being of humankind, the more trouble we're in. My advice would be to get back to the adjusting table; let's get better at it tomorrow than we were today, let's understand it more, and let's have more fun doing it.

Read "[Dr. Brian Kelly to Assume Helm at Life West](#)" for details of Dr. Clum's retirement announcement and information on the man tapped to take over the presidency in January 2011, New Zealand College of Chiropractic President Dr. Brian Kelly.

DECEMBER 2010