

Time to Get Uncomfortable?

Donald M. Petersen Jr., BS, HCD(hc), FICC(h), Publisher

While I usually wear a suit and tie to most chiropractic events, I am really a shorts and T-shirt kind of guy. If I could, I would go everywhere in a comfortable pair of shorts, a soft cotton T-shirt (preferably gray) and flip-flops. But even with Southern California weather, there comes a time when you have to change your wardrobe.

Yesterday seemed to be that day. For starters, I broke the front button on one of my favorite pairs of shorts. That same day, the temperature dropped to the point that it was just too cold to wear shorts both inside and outside. And finally, it rained.

The confluence of these events forced me into the seemingly untenable position of having to put on jeans (and a T-shirt). Generally speaking, this was not that big a deal, but it did move me from what was most comfortable to what was less comfortable. (I had to don socks and shoes to go with the jeans.)

This may not be the best analogy for what is happening in health care right now, but it does speak to the issue of being forced out of what you know and are comfortable with.

With co-pays so high, [ICD-10](#) now clumsily in place and the need to convert to [electronic health records](#) (EHR) software persistently looming, it is clear the forces that control how health care is delivered (and who gets to deliver it) are tightening their reins. All health care professionals are chafing under these and myriad other requirements taking the satisfaction out of being a doctor (not to mention the income).

For many, the solution is to practice for a few more years and then retire. But what do you do if that isn't an option? As I talk to DCs across the country wrestling with these issues, there is a seemingly obvious solution that keeps rising to the surface: Do something different! Doctors who are doing well in these trying times have taken one or more of the following paths to make themselves stand out and be more successful:

- *Specialize* – Some of the most sought-after doctors of chiropractic have put in the extra effort to become well-known at addressing specific needs: sports chiropractic, nutrition, maintenance care only, pediatrics or something else. Whatever the specialty, their expertise drives a reputation in their community that keeps them extremely busy and extremely successful.
- *Expand* – Another strategy is to create a clinic that offers more than just chiropractic. This could include adding spinal decompression, multi-professional services, a spa, a weight-loss program or a wellness clinic that addresses all aspects of health.
- *Stand Out* – If you listen to consumers talk about their experiences with chiropractic, many of the conversations ultimately lead to how good (or bad) they think their DC is. One might say, "I went to this chiropractor who was so rough, I hurt for a week." The next one might say, "I finally gave up with mine. He kept adjusting me, but I never really got much better." The third might say, "My chiropractor is great. He's very gentle and knows just how to adjust me so it takes care of whatever the problem is. I see him about once a month to keep my spine aligned and feeling good." Needless to say, you want to be known as the third

chiropractor. To do this, you have to work hard to be the best, most effective adjuster in your community.

While there are doubtless other options, all of the above strategies help you move away from a reimbursement model and more toward a cash practice. This is another common denominator among the most successful doctors I talk to – they are not dependent on insurance reimbursement.

Yes, it is harder to be successful than it was 20-30 years ago. Given the challenges with our current health care environment, our situation isn't likely to get better soon. This means you will have to work harder to adapt and overcome your present situation.

Even if you are successful now, you will still want to be aware of your changing environment and look for ways to increase the advantages you currently enjoy. Staying with what you know may work for a while, but the only way to improve your situation is to get a little *uncomfortable*.

NOVEMBER 2015