

"Doctor With A Heart" Day Is February 14

Peter G. Fernandez, DC

Times have certainly changed. The "old-time family doctor" image remains etched in the public's mind as the perfect doctor. Unfortunately, today's doctors do not enjoy the great reputations of the old-time doctors. This is due to an unprecedented wave of "bashing" of today's physicians. People feel that the wise, friendly, caring family doctor of yesterday has been replaced with a dispassionate, indifferent physician more concerned with how much money can be made and how much time can be taken off, rather than how his or her patients feel.

Ironically, chiropractors have twice the image problem medical doctors do. We weren't included, and therefore, never benefited from the positive, old-time family doctor image, but we often get lumped together with medical doctors when there's a negative perception. We make too much money and invest in health care businesses that pay more money; take too much time off to play golf; don't care enough about our patients - the list of complaints is extensive.

In addition to the public's derogatory picture of us, health insurance companies have lowered our fees; HMOs and PPOs restrict our incomes and reduce our fees; health care consultants are cutting our claims; and workers' compensation fee schedules are being reduced again, or denied totally. We make too much money?

As chiropractors, we have always prided ourselves on the individual care we give to each patient. The very nature of our profession encourages a close doctor-patient relationship. Yet the public's overall negative perception of doctors does not exclude us. And when perception becomes reality, the facts no longer matter. We need to reverse this negative image and let the public know our true commitment and intent - to heal the sick.

As individual doctors and as a profession, we must maintain the highest ethical standards and continue to provide the best health care available. Taking an active role in community affairs or charities is an important step toward improving our image and increasing the public's confidence in chiropractic.

One such charity is Doctors With A Heart (DWAH). It is comprised of chiropractors, medical doctors, osteopaths, dentists, psychologists and other professionals. Founded by Iowa dentist Dr. Duane Schmidt, it has become the largest doctor charity in the world.

I'm challenging you to participate in the national Doctors With A Heart day, on Valentine's Day, February 14. Unlike many charities, which ask you to donate money, then use much of it to pay big executive salaries and high overhead, DWAH directly benefits its recipients.

DWAH operates very simply, and is a nonprofit foundation. Each doctor contributes a tax-deductible gift of \$100, the money going directly to DWAH. Funds are used for producing and distributing program information, brochures and other promotional material for participating doctors to use.

Doctors who participate in DWAH donate all their services each Valentine's Day to anyone who needs them. It's an opportunity to make a generous contribution to the community, and a

wonderful way to help many who might otherwise not receive care. Because some patients feel reluctant to receive free care, doctors also accept canned goods, nonperishables or monetary donations. Everything the doctor collects is then donated to a local charity of his or her choice.

What could be more rewarding than helping the people in your community who can't afford proper chiropractic care? By donating your time one day a year, you become a part of a nationwide service effort dedicated to showing the world that you care. Plus, you have the added opportunity of benefiting a local charity.

Everybody wins with this program: The doctor wins because he or she gets the opportunity to help more people; the patients who receive the healing powers of chiropractic on DWAH day win; and the charity that the doctor has chosen to receive the collected donations wins.

Doctors, I encourage you to take part in this wonderful program. It's easy to get involved with DWAH. Send your \$100 check to:

Doctors With A Heart
10733 57th Avenue N
Seminole, FL 33772

Then, reserve next Valentine's Day for your "Doctors-With-A-Heart" effort.

Implementing the program is also quite easy and very rewarding. Notify your current patients that you will be providing free care next Valentine's Day. Encourage them to let their friends and relatives know about the free care. Get people involved. You can do this with a letter or on the phone.

Next, send a news release alerting your local newspapers and radio and television stations that you are participating in the DWAH program with doctors from around the country. Typically, local newspapers will want to write a column or article about your community involvement, while your local radio and TV stations will want to broadcast interviews with you. Public relations like this will be a great help in getting the word out about your efforts for such a worthy cause. I receive dozens of calls every year from the press asking about individual doctors and their participation. Needless to say, I brag about each doctor's unselfish dedication to helping sick people, garnering even more positive publicity for that doctor.

Be sure to require that your patients make appointments for your DWAH day, so you can judge the volume of patients you'll be seeing. If necessary, you may want to bring in outside help for the day. To help doctors effectively, and properly promote and conduct the event, the group provides its participants with sample news releases, program information and samples of promotional information and brochures.

Every year, DWAH day is an enriching experience for everyone involved. I'm constantly reminded of this by the many doctors, CAs and patients who tell me what a memorable experience DWAH day has been for them. It is truly an inspiring event.

The greatest thing you can do in this world is to give of yourself. With DWAH you donate your time and services, while other doctors and their personnel all over the country are doing the same. It's a powerful event. It also sends an important message to the public that chiropractors are what they have always been: caring and committed to healing the sick. Together, we can make a difference in our profession and the world around us.

There's a saying: "The more you give, the more you receive." By participating in the largest doctor-involved charity in the world, you have the opportunity to give a lot. As your community and the sick benefit from your services, you will benefit.

Doctors, we can write our own sequel to the "old-time-family-doctor" story that demonstrates the true mission of chiropractors everywhere - to help people lead healthier, drug-free lives. Donate your services each Valentine's Day and help your community. Participate in Doctors With A Heart.

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