

Chiropractor Named to Senior Outreach Post at CMS

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In another sign of the advancement of the chiropractic profession, a doctor of chiropractic has been made a member of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). In January, Richard Lawlor, DC, MBA, was named a senior outreach specialist in the center's Office of the Administrator, and was given the crucial role of improving relations between the agency and other members of the health care community.

Dr. Lawlor is believed to be only the second doctor of chiropractic ever to serve as a full-time member of an HHS agency. The first, Christine Goertz, DC, PhD, is a program director at the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM).

As a senior outreach specialist, Dr. Lawlor reports directly to administrator Thomas Scully and his senior staff, and works with a handful of other specialists as liaisons to maintain a positive working relationship between CMS and various health care providers. He also serves on the Physicians Regulatory Issues Team, and will assist in the centers' outreach efforts and Open-Door Forum program. While the position is not specifically chiropractic-related, he will play an important role when chiropractic issues are discussed.

"For the chiropractic profession, I'd like to say that I'm providing some valuable input," Dr. Lawlor said in an interview with *Dynamic Chiropractic*. "I'll definitely be able to be easily recognized as the only chiropractor here ... I'll be inclined to make sure that any policy that we do for chiropractic is appropriate and not arbitrary in any way."¹

Dr. Lawlor graduated from Life University in 1991 and was certified as a chiropractic sports physician in 1994. Before joining CMS, he operated a successful practice in Austin, Texas, for eight years, then obtained a master's in business administration from the University of Texas-Austin in 2001. In addition to his practice, he spent much of his time serving the HIV-positive population by providing complementary care at the HIV Wellness Center in Austin, and served as a board member for AIDS Services of Austin. In 1995, he joined other health care providers in treating participants at the 21st Annual National Taekwondo Championship in Houston, Texas. He has also provided care at the Motorola Marathon and the Special Olympics.

CMS is responsible for the management of Medicare, Medicaid, SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program) and other national health care initiatives. CMS has the second-largest budget outlay of the federal government, and is directly responsible for \$1 out of every \$3 spent on health care in the United States. The organization insures approximately 25% of the population of the U.S. (over 70 million beneficiaries), including the elderly, the disabled and low-income individuals. The Centers process over 1 billion claims each year, and contract with approximately 1 million providers.

Repeated efforts by the chiropractic profession to enlighten members of the Bush administration about the benefits of chiropractic care may have played a factor in Dr. Lawlor's attaining a position

with CMS. Last year, American Chiropractic Association attorney George McAndrews met with Tommy Thompson, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, to discuss issues of concern to the chiropractic profession. At the end of the discussion, Mr. McAndrews notified Mr. Thompson that while HHS employed more than 65,000 people, there were no doctors of chiropractic working in the department.

It should also be noted that when the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) became CMS in 2001, Mr. Thompson pledged that the organization would have "a more provider-friendly attitude."² Naming Dr. Lawlor a senior outreach specialist signals a definite step in the right direction.

References

1. Telephone interview with Dr. Lawlor, Feb. 19, 2003.
2. Pieratt JP. HCFA renamed. *Home Care Magazine*, Aug. 1, 2001.

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