

## If You Want Change, Read This Article

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The weekly science section that appears in the Tuesday issue of the *New York Times* is, without question, the leader in offering readers a plethora of information in the areas of science and health care. I was perusing some past issues when I saw an article by Benjamin J. Ansell, MD, in the Sept. 17, 2002, edition, that evaluated the efficacy and overall marketing of vitamins and dietary supplements related to the prevention of a heart attack. I was intrigued by his findings.

It's no small secret that the vitamin and diet supplement industries have witnessed unsurpassed growth in the past two years, but my question is, "Why?" According to Dr. Ansell, the medical industry frowns on marketing vitamins and supplements as therapeutics for heart disease, largely because of their ineffectiveness. He further asserts that the effectiveness of certain vitamins related to cardiovascular treatment have proven to be no more effective than placebos. However, Dr. Ansell concedes that the appeal of supplemental medications is understandable, especially when the costs, complexities and publicized risks of prescription medications are all on the rise.

Well, there you have it: a medical doctor addressing the obvious.

But it's not that simple, is it? This same scenario can be applied to chiropractic, which has grown exponentially. Demand continues to rise, but to be fully accepted, it must play by the same sandbox rules as conventional medicine.

How should the chiropractic industry position, promote and market itself in the ever-changing world of health care? The answer is quite simple: Focus more on the essence of marketing, and less on the principals of chiropractic. Currently, the traditional practice management "gurus" will tell you to assess a value to your services (i.e., \$29.95 for a full exam), or they will tell you to sell chiropractic through education. These techniques are amateurish, ineffective, and do not positively position the doctor in the eyes of the patient.

Anyone who truly understands how to market health care knows the number-one rule is to never market chiropractic. Rule number two is to never attach a value to health care services; it demeans the value. These rules may have worked in the past, but as more of the general public continues to demand chiropractic services, marketing in this manner will ultimately back-fire on the industry.

Focus on how and why people choose a chiropractor. Referrals are worthwhile, but again, if you focus on educating and communicating chiropractic, eventually the audience will tune you out. Just look at the facts:

- Alternative health care treatment has recently surpassed conventional medical treatment in the number of patients treated.
- More and more insurance and managed care companies recognize and cover chiropractic care.
- Doctors and allied health professionals from conventional medicine are recognizing the health-related benefits of chiropractic.

- Chiropractic is quickly becoming a primary source of health care treatment among the general public.
- Conventional medicine is being scrutinized more, due to substandard service and its association with the pharmaceutical industry in substantiating its worth (e.g., the "pill" society).

If alternative medicine (the product) is so widely accepted by the general public (the buyer), then why is the chiropractic industry having such a difficult time selling itself? I think I have an answer.

In January, I attended the Parker Seminars in Las Vegas. Having worked in conventional medicine for more than 15 years, I was impressed with the attendance. However, the content of the show was extremely disappointing. With all of the "firepower" in its pocket, why does the chiropractic industry use actor William Shatner, author Wayne Dyer, or any other motivational "keynote" speaker? Shouldn't the seminar series focus more on studies or technique? I know that one day of the seminar was dedicated to technique - but it was muffled by the crowds of people seeking answers about this or that potion or oil. What about chiropractic?

This brings me back to marketing and positioning. There is something amiss when a major cardiovascular magazine reveals a new study using protein in the blood to diagnose heart problems and garners national news, yet chiropractic can barely muster local press. Enough with the backpacks; the general public demands more!

I think local and national plans need to be deployed simultaneously. From a local perspective, every doctor should know that promotion and marketing needs to focus on the doctor.

I go to my doctor because he's a friend from my Rotary Club. I've been referred to several chiropractors in the past by friends and medical doctors, but I've chosen this doctor because he's personable, friendly, community-oriented, and I know his kids. These are the real reasons why and how people identify a chiropractor, and why they will always remain loyal. In the long run, I already expect that the chiropractor is capable of treating me.

Health care is an intangible; you cannot touch or feel it - but it's worth a million dollars. Therefore, I will only trust my million-dollar health with someone I know to be capable; but more importantly, someone whom I respect and admire as a person who shares my values and beliefs.

Nationally, radical changes need to be made in the industry. Chiropractors from across the country need to rise up and demand more!

First and foremost, there is no unity in the industry. Second, and I think, more importantly, there is such a lack of leadership and marketing know-how that even the so-called leaders cannot hold a candle to conventional medicine. So, what do they do? They blame their problems on the medical industry as a whole, or the leadership itself, i.e., the ACA or state organizations. The leaders are reactive, rather than proactive.

If grassroots organizations with little infrastructure can rally hundreds of thousands of people to protest the war and obtain global attention, chiropractic should be able to rally doctors to the call.

So, you still don't believe me? Entire nations have embraced public relations to embark on aggressive plans to sway public opinion. Public relations is powerful, and chiropractic needs to grow up and embrace it, instead of dedicating millions of dollars to reactionary legal issues.

Every doctor needs to demand that his or her state association immediately allocate a significant portion of its budget to public relations and marketing. I challenge you to inquire about public relations with your state association, or even the ACA or ICA. You'll soon find they do not have a public relations staff or a plan, or that the person running the public relations department is a volunteer doctor or someone with little experience. We need to be on the attack.

How can we assemble a team of chiropractors to speak to the media on health care issues? How do we take a number of these doctors and transform them into "nationally recognized" spokespersons, to proactively change the minds and hearts of the American people? The first step is to substantiate chiropractic's worth.

I'll make it simple for you: If you really want to make a difference and see dramatic change, contact me. With enough support, we can empower the industry to change!

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