

Ant or Grasshopper?

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with guest author Thomas Carpenter, DC

Dr. Rand Baird is the editor of this column. His "Talk Back" forum and a brief biography are available at www.chiroweb.com/columnist/baird.

Ant or grasshopper? Which are you? Why is it important?

"Oh no," you may say, "Here we go with another crisis!" Not yet - but it truly is up to you whether it becomes one. For the past 20 years, a minority has been quietly positioning the chiropractic profession into a laudable force within the largest organization responsible for shaping health policy in the United States.

While their successes have not always made the headlines, the individuals comprising this minority have been responsible for many social and political advances the chiropractic profession has enjoyed the past two decades. How did they do it? By joining in and becoming partners, rather than antagonists, in practicing, promoting and restoring health - with the purpose of benefiting the community at large. The key here is "joining in" - rolling up one's sleeves and going to work with the health care community, specifically, the oldest and largest health care advocacy organization in the world: the 55,000-member-strong American Public Health Association (APHA).

The APHA is important to you simply because it is the largest forum from which to influence public health policy development. It is where chiropractors can network with other health professionals and government agencies, and from where we can represent our interests to the government, industry, the health care system and the public.

Has the Chiropractic Health Care (CHC) section of the APHA had an impact? Consider this: In 1969, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (DHEW) concluded that chiropractic theory and practice were not based on the body of knowledge related to health, disease, and health care that has been widely accepted by the scientific community, and that the scope and quality of chiropractic education did not prepare the practitioner to make an adequate diagnosis and provide appropriate treatment. Thus, the DHEW recommended that chiropractic services should not be covered by Medicare. The APHA also concluded that chiropractic was a hazard to the health and safety of the country's citizens, and recommended that Congress cut Medicaid and Medicare benefits for chiropractic, and furthermore, that the states legislate chiropractic out of state health programs. APHA also urged the states to consider stepping up policing of existing restrictions, or abolishing chiropractic licenses altogether!

Our response? In 1979, Dr. Rand Baird began a recruiting effort that resulted in chiropractic becoming the fastest-growing body of members in the APHA. During this time, Dr. Baird and his colleagues succeeded in having the APHA Governing Council reconsider its policy against chiropractic; in 1983, the APHA issued a new policy (superseding the previous one) more favorable to chiropractic. The successes didn't end there. Currently, chiropractors sit on the governing

council, can propose policy changes, and can have a voice in the development of APHA directives and actions.

So, what does this have to do with being an ant or a grasshopper? You probably remember Aesop's fable: The ants worked hard all summer storing provisions for winter, while the grasshopper danced about, having a good time. When winter came and the grasshopper began to starve, he asked the ants for food. They refused and said he could dance through the winter, as far as they were concerned. The moral of that tale has been interpreted to mean that while you may spend your time as you please, you should never let yourself become dependent on the self-satisfied. Another interpretation is that this represents "just desserts" or fair return on investment. Maybe the best, most relevant interpretation is that it is necessary to plan ahead for survival.

How is all this relevant to you? Currently, the Chiropractic Health Care section of the APHA has slipped from nearly 800 members to just above 200. The danger is that this will soon result in the profession losing its voice, its credibility, and its section status among the 55,000-plus public health professionals and affiliates who are the APHA! I am asking you, fellow chiropractic health care professionals, to take the responsible path of the ant - preserve your profession's voice, safeguard its political position, and join the APHA to help continue the development of pro-chiropractic policies for our future survival.

All this requires of you is that you join today by completing an online form and sending it with your check to the APHA. Preserve the hard-earned position we now enjoy in the most influential health care advocacy organization in the world. "There never has been a better time to be in chiropractic ..." but it surely could be worse! Thank you for your support. It will make a difference!

To join or renew individual doctor or student memberships, contact Dr. Lisa Killinger, Chiropractic Health Care section membership chair, at (563) 884-5854 (CDT), or Killinger_L@palmer.edu. You can download a copy of the membership application directly at www.apha.org/membership/.

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