

Chiropractic vs. Conventional Medicine: Heed the Call!

Christopher Malter

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles on public relations and marketing techniques for your practice. We'd like to welcome the author of this new column, Christopher Malter, the CEO of The Guide, a communications company dedicated to advancing the chiropractic profession by helping doctors develop and deploy the most advanced PR and marketing. Mr. Malter has more than 15 years' experience in this field, including working with leading hospitals and medical centers, insurance and managed care organizations, and the general public. His marketing campaigns have involved working with reporters at the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *CNN*, *ABC News* and many trade publications.

After 15 years of consulting, one thing is certain: There is a definite reason conventional medicine is widely accepted by the general public. It's no secret that the industry has substantiated its worth through scientific research and clinical trials. But it is through more sophisticated, result-driven marketing and public relations campaigns that the industry has positioned itself and disseminated key message points. Today, I embark on a crusade to present enhanced techniques and strategies to chiropractic.

Why Is Conventional Medicine Widely Accepted?

Since its inception, chiropractic has played a secondary role to conventional medicine. However, over the last 10 years, chiropractic has made significant headway in positioning the profession as a primary source of treatment.

Unlike conventional medicine, which has an extremely sophisticated infrastructure and support system in place to assist doctors to market and position themselves positively in their local communities, chiropractic has nothing. DCs earn their degrees, obtain their licenses and then "wing" it.

Compare this scenario to that of medical students. They have the public relations expertise of the medical school, hospital, or medical center where they interned. The medical students rely on the pharmaceutical industry, managed care organizations, medical trade groups and associations, and many other medical-related businesses to effectively position, promote and market their services.

The Solution

Communication is power, and every aspect of life is based on it. The cars we buy, the houses we purchase, the clothes we wear - all convey messages to people that we want them to interpret and hear. This concept is also true in business. Doctors of chiropractic can position themselves and their practices as shoe salespersons offering the best deals in town, or as facilitators and healers, with the most advanced techniques to treat virtually every ailment known to mankind. This is all based on the

essence of communication.

1. The Institutional Level

There have been numerous grassroots efforts in the private and public arenas to promote the chiropractic profession. I greatly applaud and support these efforts in offering some assistance from an institutional level. However, with more than 4,000 chiropractic school graduates each year and nearly 60,000 practicing doctors in the U.S., chiropractors must primarily rely on themselves.

2. Colleges and Universities

Are schools of chiropractic effectively addressing and preparing their students with classes comparable with this changing paradigm? Practice management classes are germane, but offering generic public relations and marketing tools does not truly address the power of effective communications.

As chiropractic continues to evolve, a more sophisticated approach to marketing and promotion among doctors must be developed and deployed to effectively compete in this ever-changing marketplace.

The first step in preparing doctors is to integrate this approach with public relations and marketing throughout the industry's educational system. For example, the creation of a brochure to many doctors might focus on chiropractic and health care. However, chiropractic should never be included in positioning oneself or one's practice. Health care is intangible. Doctors need to create a brochure from a patient's perspective. The patient is more concerned about key attributes of the doctor, i.e., personality; integrity; conviction; treatment; confidence; trust; empathy; understanding; etc.

In creating a brochure that incorporates these attributes, the doctor who integrates this communications tool in public relations and marketing campaigns is the true professional, compared to the doctor who just utilizes the brochure as reading material. Doctors must be taught how to develop and integrate the following:

- logos
- brochures
- websites
- newsletters
- patient/employee fact sheets
- news releases
- media alerts
- media visibility
- direct mail campaigns
- partnerships
- a chiropractic health day

The Future of Chiropractic vs. Conventional Medicine

To substantiate this column, I present the following:

- The primary force behind the ongoing growth of conventional medicine has been the pharmaceutical industry, embraced by physicians and pharmacists, who qualify their worth through treat disease. For example, if a patient is diagnosed with breast cancer, the physician

prescribes tamoxifen. If a patient is diagnosed with schizophrenia, clozaril is prescribed. All drugs are reactionary.

- Over the last 10 years, the pharmaceutical industry has targeted the general public through "educational" programs and marketing campaigns about the benefits of compounds. In truth, the industry has been empowering people to become more involved in their doctors' prescribing methods. In doing this, side-effects and contraindications continue to rise, along with lawsuits against the pharmaceutical industry and physicians.
- In response, the general public has responded by seeking alternative treatment methods. Thus, the growth within the chiropractic industry and the number of patient visits.
- The pharmaceutical industry, coupled with biotech, is aggressively developing proactive compounds. DNA sequencing, combined with proteomics, is leading the way. In a very short time, drugs will be customized, based on a patient's propensity for specific illnesses (i.e., diabetes, cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer's). For example, once a baby is born, a DNA sample will be taken and analyzed. The results will reveal that the baby has a high propensity for diabetes, hypertension and Alzheimer's. To offset these potential health problems, patients will be prescribed drugs before a disease materializes.

Since we already live in a "pill society," it will be quite easy to market and institutionalize this approach. The reduction in health care costs alone will be a leading factor in society's complete acceptance of this new proactive approach to health care.

In analyzing the growth of the chiropractic industry, it is important to identify the catalyst. Doctors of chiropractic must take the reins to control their future. I implore all doctors, regardless of the solvency of their practices, to heed this call. To effectively address this paradigm shift, chiropractic doctors must develop and deploy more sophisticated public relations and marketing campaigns that position them not as hucksters, but as viable, primary sources of health care.

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