

Some Reflections on Palmer in Florida

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As the time approaches for the opening of Palmer College of Chiropractic Florida - the first class will begin October 7 - it seems appropriate for me, as the new school's president, to bring readers of *Dynamic Chiropractic* up to speed on at least a couple of important aspects of what's happening with Palmer in the Sunshine State.

As you can imagine, jumping through the necessary hoops to get a new school licensed, started, accredited and sustained as a high-quality program takes tremendous energy. Palmer staffers, myself included, are flying back and forth to Florida with increasing frequency these days. We have selected a top administrator and hired the startup faculty. We are scurrying to remodel our temporary facilities in Port Orange, with the first permanent building still a year away. It's exciting, and it's a scramble, but we're optimistic that things will fall into the right places at the right times.

First, let me give you the latest on the enrollment picture. The interest among prospective students has been, to coin a phrase, beyond our expectations. Here are the numbers we received in mid-August from our admissions people. Since the word first got out that we would open the school, we have received 1,817 inquiries and 181 applications. We have 106 applications for the first class in October, but our limited space in temporary facilities forced us to cap that class at 45. Presumably many of those who didn't get their applications and related paperwork in early enough to get accepted for seats in the first class will try for the next class in January 2003 or the third entry point in July 2003. In addition to those who applied for the first class and didn't get in, another 58 are applying specifically for the second or third class. So, there will be no shortage of students at Palmer College of Chiropractic Florida.

Remember, because we're only beginning with first-quarter instruction, these are not transfer students. These are new students, making a decision to become chiropractors and get a Palmer education in Florida. We're pleased with the quantity and quality of the students. Florida requires that students have a bachelor's degree, not upon entrance, but upon graduation. Well, 35 of those 45 first-quarter students already have their bachelor's degree upon entrance. It speaks well of the gradually improving standards in chiropractic education. Although a bachelor's degree is not required before graduation at Palmer College in Davenport, we are considering a proposal to require one. The current prerequisite for entry is 90 hours at all chiropractic colleges (basically three years out of the traditional four in an undergrad program), but at some point down the road, our profession can expect that having a bachelor's degree will be a prerequisite for entry. All this says positive things about interest in the chiropractic profession today, and the quality of chiropractic education tomorrow. In the case of Florida, it also says a lot about hospitality toward chiropractic.

I just returned from the Florida Chiropractic Association (FCA) convention in Orlando, and it's easy to understand why chiropractic is so strong in Florida. What a spectacular show! The FCA and the Florida Chiropractic Society (FCS) have done a great job in promoting chiropractic in their state over

the years. Palmer hosted a reception and had a booth at the convention, and I have to say that the thousands of doctors who came to our booth or otherwise approached us were overwhelmingly favorable and excited about Palmer coming to Florida. Literally dozens volunteered to help us recruit students or support us in other ways. I interpret this to mean more than support for Palmer. It tells me that the rank and file in our profession want chiropractic education to move forward for the betterment of the profession and patient care. Those of us in leadership roles are getting the message loud and clear: That which ought to unite us is of far greater worth than what is perceived to divide us.

In that regard, the theme Palmer selected for its own Lyceum show in Davenport a few weeks ago was "Building Bridges." One of my points during the opening ceremony was a plea to "lower the rhetoric" and change the politics of exclusion to the politics of inclusion. We presented a letter of congratulations to the FCA leadership for its work at gathering public support for chiropractic education. Yes, Palmer still has concerns about the nature of a chiropractic program at Florida State University or elsewhere in the public sector, but, as I have said for a long time, there's no question that the time is ripe for public support. Our interest is in working with other elements of our profession's leadership to assure that what the public ends up supporting is truly in the best interests of students, doctors and their patients. Palmer is interested in building bridges with the leadership of the entire chiropractic profession.

How is Palmer doing on getting its Florida program accredited? Well, some confusion has erupted on that front, and I hope to provide clarification. Palmer interpreted its early communications with the Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE) to mean that our accreditation of the Palmer College program in Davenport would be routinely extended to the new classes in Florida, i.e., that our Florida program was accredited on the strength of our Davenport program. On June 20, 2002, we received a letter from the CCE that we had gone too far and should stop making that claim. We complied as rapidly as possible, reprinting brochures, changing the website and writing our alumni, prospective students and others to describe the status of the accreditation situation. It should be obvious to all that since we won't be taking transfer students in Florida initially anyway, we would have nothing to gain by knowingly making a claim the CCE didn't support. It was a misunderstanding, clear and simple. We regret the confusion it caused. However, at this point we believe we are in full compliance and are working with the CCE to get accreditation accomplished within the first year of our program. We're still totally optimistic that we're on track. The CCE has given us "preliminary approval to proceed," and we will work closely with the accrediting agency to assure that from here on, we're of common mind and action.

Here's an interesting aspect that relates to building bridges and lowering the rhetoric. The confidential document from the CCE to Palmer was in effect a warning that if we didn't comply, the CCE would make a public announcement to that effect. We complied, but the confidential warning letter was leaked to the media. Since a month and a half had elapsed since the confidential letter was sent, and the CCE declined comment, the reporter and whoever was feeding him had no way of knowing whether Palmer had complied or not. Clearly, the leakers and their reporter accomplice had only one motive - to hurt Palmer and destroy the confidence prospective students would have in a Palmer chiropractic education.

Of course, this comes in the wake of the difficulties Life University is having with its accreditation. The most painful aspect of the Life accreditation issue is the damage done to Life students, and by extension, to those who may lose confidence in the quality of chiropractic educational institutions in general. Viewed through that lens, those who seek to tarnish Palmer's credibility, whatever their

reasons, end up contributing to blackening the entire profession's credibility. Great opportunity stands before our profession in Florida and elsewhere, but we risk slamming those doors in our own faces. What could be more unethical for those claiming to support chiropractic than to leak confidential documents, the content of which may no longer be relevant, with the purpose to denigrate the flagship of their own profession? We ought to be building bridges rather than blowing them up.

In some ways, our Florida situation is a microcosm of our profession in the 21st century. There are wonderful opportunities for us. Thanks to the hard work and high level of chiropractic care over the decades, the public is more than ready for what we have to offer. At the same time we also have differing opinions about the kinds of chiropractic care and what sort of education ought to be offered. Political agendas abound, fostering disunity and distrust.

When I think about the state of chiropractic, a scene from the movie "Braveheart" comes to mind: William Wallace has to convince the squabbling Scottish lords that they need to unite to secure their freedom. A prerequisite to our professional freedom and success is unity of vision. Achieving that requires us to stay calm, choose to think the best of one another instead of the worst, and move forward a step at a time. We all should be bridgebuilders.

There is a beautiful lighthouse just near Port Orange at Ponce Inlet. In a video we did earlier this year for governmental officials, educators and other guests, we cross-dissolved the famous Palmer beacon in Davenport with that Florida lighthouse. The beacon in Davenport goes back decades in our profession's history as a symbol of light and hope for the "Big Idea of Chiropractic." It is more than a Palmer College symbol. It symbolizes natural, noninvasive health care for the betterment of human society. Beginning this October, the first chiropractic college in Florida's history opens its doors. It is another version of that same beacon of hope our profession has kept burning since our historic beginnings.

We will have a ribbon-cutting and groundbreaking ceremony at Port Orange on October 4, 2002 in conjunction with the city's annual Family Days activities. It'll be a great time. If you would like an invitation to celebrate with us, simply contact my office in Davenport. You're more than welcome to attend, and understand that we will be celebrating more than Palmer. We'll be celebrating chiropractic and its benefits to millions in Florida and far beyond.

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SEPTEMBER 2002