

Chiropractic within Public Health - A Fish on a Bicycle?

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Public health has never been a popular topic with chiropractors. Public health-related topics comprise less than two percent of coursework at most chiropractic colleges, and only 200 of the 64,790 chiropractors in the United States belong to the American Public Health Association (APHA).

"What do we have to do with public health?" chiropractors often ask.

Plenty. Public health is a society's efforts to protect, promote and restore health. Chiropractors spend most of their time protecting, promoting and restoring the health of individual patients. Is it such a conceptual leap to comprehend health maintenance at the level of the community, rather than the individual?

This primary emphasis on health care for the individual is common to most health professionals, not just chiropractors. However, chiropractors are perhaps unique in viewing what they do as being completely unrelated to public health activities; thus, the fish-on-a-bicycle analogy.

Because of this disconnection, chiropractors are missing many opportunities to increase their sphere of influence and patient base through greater involvement in community health activities. How can you get started in doing this? Like health professionals from all the professions, a simple way to get involved in public health is to join APHA.

APHA is the oldest, largest and most influential public health organization in the U.S. and the world. For years, it has been the venue in which the chiropractic profession and many individual DCs, just like other health professionals, have integrated their activities with those of mainstream public health endeavors. And these activities have greatly increased chiropractic communication and credibility with the other learned professions and disciplines involved with healing the sick and injured, and promoting health and well being among the populations of the world.

With over 55,000 members, APHA has tremendous influence politically, professionally and socially. Members drive APHA's policy agendas. A mere handful of dedicated chiropractors who became APHA members over a decade ago were able to change APHA policy from anti-chiropractic to pro-chiropractic, which had far-reaching effects. Eventually, they established the Chiropractic Health Care (CHC) Section, which, although one of APHA's smaller sections, has been extremely proactive and has done a great deal to increase the visibility of our profession in the public health arena.

Another example of how chiropractors can contribute to and benefit from public health activities: Some years ago, due to a small group of chiropractors being actively involved in public health and APHA, the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA), of which APHA is an important member, endorsed the World Federation of Chiropractic's (WFC) application to become an affiliate of

the World Health Organization (WHO). Chiropractic participation within APHA paved the way for chiropractic's acceptance by the WHO.

An upcoming opportunity for chiropractors to enter into new collaborative public health-related activities will occur at this year's annual APHA meeting in Philadelphia, PA. The CHC section, with Lisa Killinger, DC, as chairperson, took the lead in obtaining a grant from APHA to offer a health promotion and prevention booth at the November 2002 meeting, in collaboration with the Podiatry, Vision Care and Oral Health sections of APHA. In this mega-health booth, members from each of these sections will offer attendees health screenings and education about their respective profession's role in public health. This is a perfect opportunity for chiropractic to demonstrate its commitment to public health, and its willingness to collaborate with other health professions for the good of the population.

APHA's annual meeting - with over 12,000 attendees - gives chiropractors an unparalleled opportunity to network with other health professionals and identify ways to increase their involvement in community, state and national health-related activities.

The annual meeting offers over 900 educational sessions and an exposition hall with over 550 booths on health-related topics and programs. CHC sessions, and many others, are approved for continuing education credit for chiropractors. APHA's publications (the *American Journal of Public Health* and *The Nation's Health*, both free to members) offer a wealth of health information on topics relevant to chiropractors. These include:

- prevention and health promotion;
- complementary and alternative therapies;
- international health;
- anti-smoking and anti-drug resources;
- injury prevention;
- maternal and child health;
- nutrition and diet;
- exercise and physical activity;
- occupational health and safety;
- healthy aging and care of older adults; and
- environmental health.

This year's APHA annual meeting in Philadelphia will have sessions with chiropractic presentations from November 11-13.

For further information on participating in the public health effort by joining APHA, go to www.apha.org/membership. You may also contact CHC Chairperson Dr. Lisa Killinger at killinger_1@palmer.edu or call 800-682-1625. APHA annual meeting registration is available at www.apha.org/meetings/registration.htm. Also, to join the international public health work of chiropractic, see the WFC website, www.wfc.org.

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