

Chiropractic in Cuba: an Opportunity to Help 11,000,000 People

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Chiropractic in Cuba, per the Cuban government census, is nonexistent. My relationship with Cuba started in 1979 when I treated Alberto Juantoreno, the country's national Olympic hero. (*Editor's note: At the 1976 Montreal Olympics, Alberto Juantoreno made track and field history by winning gold in the 400 and 800-meter races, an Olympic first.*)

In 1985, as a result of helping Alberto, I was asked to participate in the 1st Congress of Applied Sciences in Havana. I was also a guest of Dr. Alvarez Cambras, personal physician to Fidel Castro and head of Frank Pais Orthopedic Hospital in Havana. He was very direct and clear that the Cuban health system was very interested in alternative health care. He was particularly complimentary about my work in sports, and had hopes that we could introduce chiropractic into the Cuban health care system, along with acupuncture, homeopathy and other forms of nonallopathic health care.

Every time I met with the Cuban team, the same interest was expressed. Unfortunately, due to the U.S. embargo of Cuba, there was not a lot that we as a profession could do. So, I continued my work by example, always willing to help-no matter what the political atmosphere. Every opportunity I had, I met with chiropractors from Spanish-speaking countries, and discussed the opportunity to introduce chiropractic into Cuba. Unfortunately, no one was organized enough or able to follow through, at least not until now.

The National Council of Churches, with 50 million members nationally, headed by Sec. Gen. Rev. Dr. Bob Edgar, former U.S. congressman (he served in congress for 12 years), has a great humanitarian interest in bringing medical aid, supplies, educational materials and equipment into Cuba. And, yes, to fulfill Cuba's medical and alternative health care need to learn more. The Cuban people are an honest, loving, caring, intelligent people. Collectively, they have learned to live with very little material means, yet they are very willing to support their neighbors, each other, their families and extended families.

It was gratifying to meet people who not only know their neighbors' names, but the condition of their health and well-being: a society where a neighborhood will contribute help if a member of a family is ill and the family cannot afford medication. Churches band together to help all people, no matter what their religion. People are not prejudiced on any level; color, race or creed makes no difference. They are people open to do what's best for their population. They just want results, and they don't want to be dependent on anyone else. They have a great appetite and a desire to learn.

The key to integrating the chiropractic profession into Cuba is by getting the chiropractic profession to first write letters to President Clinton and the U.S. Senators and Congressmen, urging them to lift the embargo.*

Secondly, our chiropractic educators have an opportunity to start dialogue now to introduce an

academic curriculum in Cuban medical schools. Thirdly, it's important to support the Cuban health care system by providing the latest supplies, equipment, educational aids, books, videos and financial aid. They are in the greatest need of x-ray equipment; view boxes; cassettes; film processing equipment; and everything needed for a diagnostic center in their emergency clinics. I saw them using x-ray equipment dating back to 1948.

The need for emergency aid equipment is magnified by the number of old buildings, some 200-300 years old, with hurricane-weathered ceilings and walls. The threat of disaster comes with each major storm. Emergency doctors say that they have a four-minute response time and a 15-minute total victim recovery time. Without paramedic and emergency equipment to save lives, they are limited in their ability to rescue people. They need all forms of emergency books and training. This is a great opportunity for the chiropractic and medical professions to come together in offering assistance to a country that has proven to be worthy of help.

Even though Cubans themselves have had little, they have shared with others. The Latin American School of Medicine offers a six-year medical course teaching 2,250 students from more than 30 countries, including Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean and Africa. These students are 100 percent subsidized; room and board, schoolbooks, etc., are paid for by the Cuban government. The selection criteria: the students must come from a poor family, must meet academic requirements, and must be willing to return to their homeland and contribute five years of service to their communities. The Cubans have asked for nothing in return. The benefits to Cuba, however, are tremendous: namely gratitude, respect and affection from the many who have been the beneficiaries of their good will.

All the Cold War U.S. propaganda cannot change the truth that the Cuban medical system has gained international recognition for their doctors' abilities to provide medical services selflessly and with very little compensation. The chiropractic profession has an opportunity to influence the entire world by reinforcing the Cuban people and their health care system.

I personally plan to take delegations of comprehensive health care specialists, chiropractors, podiatrists, emergency medical physicians and emergency response teams to Cuba. Other invited groups will include members of the American Back Society, members of the American College of Sports medicine and other medical and dental specialists to exchange information and help. I will be donating my time and resources, including teaching courses to help spread the chiropractic/orthopedic/sports science self-help approach to health.

Hypocrites noted that "doctor" means "teacher." I have lived my professional life by this code. However, I think of myself as a student. What little I know, I am willing to share.

I have learned to respect and love the Cuban people. I have pledged to the Cuban Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches that I would do everything possible to help lift the embargo on Cuba. The Cuban people are in great need of medical supplies and equipment. The National Council of Churches has recently received a license from the U.S. government to bring these necessities into Cuba.

If you are interested in donating equipment, medical supplies, monies, your time, etc., contact:

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**Editor's note:* In mid-October, the Senate voted 86-8 to ease trade sanctions on Cuba for the first time in 40 years. Cuba would be allowed to purchase food and medicine from the U.S., with the help of third-party financiers, but prohibits U.S. public or private financial institutions from financing those sales. Under certain humanitarian circumstances, the U.S. president may waive the ban and allow direct U.S. financing. The bill bans U.S. travel to Cuba, and takes away the president's prerogative to determine the travel restrictions. President Clinton has not threatened to veto the bill, but does not like some of its provisions.

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