

The Power of Misinformation

APRIL FOOLS' DAY JOKE BACKFIRES ON PALMER STUDENT PAPER

Editorial Staff

The tradition of April Fools' Day goes back centuries.* In some countries, April 1st is a day to trick friends and family with a bogus story. Not all countries, of course, observe this day, or if they do, it's not necessarily in April. For instance, in some Spanish-speaking countries, December 28 (*Día de los Inocentes*) is the day to fool people, but their day is rooted in the Christian observance of the massacre of children in Bethlehem at the order of King Herod (Matthew 2:16).

In the U.S, one particularly fertile outlet for April Fools' spoofs has been college newspapers. In that tradition, the Palmer student newspaper, *The Beacon*, published an April Fools' Day article, i.e., an intentionally false story. The article was also featured on the website of the *Quad-City Times* ([url=<http://www.qconline.com>]<http://www.qconline.com>[url]), the newspaper for the Davenport area.

The Beacon's headline was: "Chiropractors to No Longer Be Called "Doctor." It was asserted that seven state boards had agreed to no longer refer to DCs as doctors, and that DCs would be given the same status as PTs.

Generally, April Fools' Day spoofs are rather wild leaps of imagination. *The Beacon's* lampoon had two problems: It was too close to home (many people still don't consider DCs "real doctors"), and there was no indication at the bottom of the article that it was a joke. Instead, there was a "Click here" link for "more about these changes." Until April 21, the link (which was to take the reader to a web page that said, "April Fools!") did not work.

The truth is, many DCs, accepting the *Quad-City Times* as a credible source, believed the article. *Dynamic Chiropractic* received many frantic inquiries. And because the information was on the web, foreign DCs also contacted us.

Coincidentally, the spoof was posted during the same time that all of the state chiropractic licensing boards were in Philadelphia for their annual meeting. As a result, many DCs calling the state licensing boards of Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Florida, Texas and Ohio were unable to get the information needed to refute the article.

We asked the student-run editorial staff of *The Beacon* to comment on publishing the article:

"In an effort to inject some levity into the chiropractic profession, *The Beacon*, the student newspaper of Palmer College of Chiropractic, decided to take advantage of April Fool's Day and print several articles of fictitious content. The cover article, 'Chiropractors to No Longer Be Called Doctor,' has evidently caught the attention of the chiropractic profession and duped quite a few readers. We assure you that the article has no merit or factual basis and is nothing more than an April Fool's joke.

"We are concerned, however, about the readers who responded with a knee-jerk reaction and became exasperated without questioning the source of the information or the validity of its content. Additionally, the responses from those who realized it was a joke and were not amused were equally concerning. It appears that those who 'believed' the article were disappointed and angry with themselves for assuming legitimacy, and thus, feeling foolish. It is truly an example of the saying, 'The pen is mightier than the sword.'

"Nevertheless, for those who found amusement, we are delighted. For those who did not, remember, paranoia can be a powerful weapon."

The Beacon Editorial Staff

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Palmer President Guy Riekeman commented: "The fact it was a spoof was quickly recognized when it appeared in the student newspaper circulated on campus. It was labeled as a joke and taken as such. Unfortunately, when it was put on the internet, it was not immediately discernible as a prank. Clearly this age of instant communication requires new levels of personal responsibility in disseminating information."

- The origins of April Fools' Day, while not conclusive, apparently began in France¹ as *poisson d'Avril* (April fish) when Charles IX in 1564 got a jump on Europe by changing the new year from April 1 to Jan. 1. Those who forgot the day of the new year were the butt of jokes, which might include a dried fish at one's door or on one's back.

In 1545, the Council of Trent authorized Pope Paul III to reform the Julian calendar, but it wasn't until 1582 that Pope Gregory XIII authorized the Gregorian calendar. However, the Protestants were not inclined to accept the Catholic calendar. The Germans and Dutch, for example, did not convert to the new calendar until 1698; not until 1752 for England; and not until 1918 for the Russians.

1. *Le Livre des Fêtes* Albin-Michel Jeunesse - Agnes Rosenstiehl.

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