

Whatever Happened to the Art?

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This column is supposed to be about issues related to industrial consulting, consulting for the most part, it is. However, every once in a while, I use it as a forum to share my feelings and observations about issues relevant to the chiropractic profession. Okay, so maybe I use it to vent my frustrations a bit. I'll admit that, and that's exactly what I'm going to do this time.

In addition to teaching at Los Angeles College of Chiropractic, I teach a number of postgraduate courses and lecture to a wide array of audiences. Recently, at a lecture in a state I won't divulge, a chiropractor in the audience asked me for an adjustment. That's a fairly frequent occurrence. I usually take it as a compliment, i.e., someone is asking me to adjust them because they have confidence in my abilities. Even so, I'm always a bit leery of treating someone that I don't know in a state where I'm not licensed, but this particular incident really struck a nerve with me. Let me explain.

I was lecturing with a couple of fellow DCs and was standing in the back of the meeting room waiting my turn to present my portion of the program. Nearby was a portable adjusting table that was to be used during the "hands-on" portion of the seminar. A gentleman approached me and asked, rather abruptly, "You a chiropractor?"

"Yes, I am."

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Paul Hooper." My response didn't seem to impress him nearly as much as I would have liked.

"Fix me!" he insisted.

"Excuse me?" I questioned.

"Fix me!" he ordered.

"Is this a test?" I asked. "What is it you want fixed?"

His response is what caught me off guard. "I don't know, you're the doctor."

"Give me a hint," I countered. "Are you having trouble with your neck, your low back, headaches, your big toe? Give me some kind of clue."

At this point, he was obviously irritated by my response (or lack of it) and moved off to find someone else. I watched as he tapped another DC on the shoulder, who obediently followed him back to the adjusting table and proceeded to "fix him." By the way, all of this occurred while the lecture continued.

What's really amazing is what happened when the DC "adjusted" him. The first DC (the "patient") was

instructed to lay prone on the table. The second DC (the "doctor") then placed his hand on the left sacroiliac joint and pulled the leg into the air. He repeated this "procedure" on the right side, then, apparently having gathered all the necessary information, proceeded to "crack" the patient's back.

That's what I said. He gave one of those famous and oh-so-specific adjustments that chiropractors seem to love to give at seminars. You know the one I mean. The doctor placed his hands on both sides of the patient's spine and cracked everything in sight, turned the patient onto his right side and gave one of those "million dollar rolls" that we love so much, then turned him on the other side and did the same thing. Then came the cervical "adjustment." Need I say more?

As I watched this demonstration of manipulative skill, I thought, what an artist this guy is! What skill he's demonstrating! He's able to make all of those joints crack in one single visit! Wow! Am I impressed! And that exam! What more could anyone ask? I wondered if the DC who served as the adjusting mannequin got the "fix" that he needed? After all, it's been a long time since I've seen such a thorough examination of a new patient. (Anybody detect any sarcasm in that? Just to be on the safe side, so that nobody misunderstands me, I suppose I should state that I was not impressed by what I saw).

The really sad thing is that this is a very common occurrence. Do we really have such a total lack of respect for the things we do with our hands that we would trust our own health to someone we have never met, and in the back of a dark lecture hall? I don't know about you, but I'm sort of careful about whom I ask to adjust me. Quite honestly, I've seen a few chiropractors I wouldn't want an adjustment from.

As an aside, it's not at all uncommon to have guests in a chiropractic lecture. Sometimes they are MDs; sometimes they are attorneys; sometimes they are individuals from insurance companies. I'm not sure if there were any non-DCs in the room during this exhibition, but I wonder what they would have thought if they had seen such a demonstration.

A number of years ago, when I was a young chiropractor struggling to find my own identity and survive in the early years of practice, I was fortunate enough to find a mentor, Dr. Len Faye. During the following decade, I followed Dr. Faye across the country and was privileged to learn from him and become his friend. Over the years, Dr. Faye provided me with a great deal of inspiration and guidance. He taught me an "art" and gave me confidence, but most of all, he made the chiropractic adjustment - the actual manipulative procedure - a thing to be revered and respected. He made the adjustment important and placed great emphasis on the skills required. He made me proud of the skills I had developed. Len, I haven't told you this lately, but thanks!

Over the years, I have taught countless DCs and chiropractic students to palpate and adjust. I've tried to pass along the respect for the skill that I was given by Dr. Faye. I have to admit that in many respects, I think I have failed. I say this because it's far more common to watch DCs adjust each other at seminars in a manner very similar to that described above. I don't often see DCs take the time to ask questions, to examine, and to palpate their "patients." Instead, I see a lot of back cracking. Maybe what we do in our offices is quite different from the manner in which we "treat" each other in the back of a lecture hall, but I don't think so. I think it's a reflection of the doctors that we are on a day-to-day basis.

Okay, now for the moral of the story. If you haven't figured it out by now, I was appalled by the experience. I hate to tell you, folks, but I think we are in danger of losing the "art." I don't mean to

mystify or deify "the adjustment." Too many have done that in the past. It's not a magic wand or a panacea. It's simply a therapeutic tool. But since it's the primary tool that separates the chiropractic profession from a broad array of alternative therapies, you'd think we'd take it seriously.

OCTOBER 1999