

Commencement of Article - MSc Chiropractic Programme

Joseph Morley

In late December, 1996 I was approached by a faculty member of the University of Surrey who said that the university might be interested in a chiropractic programme. I met with members of the European Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (EIHMS), a school of the University of Surrey. They thought that my proposal had merit and that it fit in with one of their objectives, to develop multi-disciplinary and multi-professional health related courses. I was very impressed by the vision and multi-disciplinary emphasis of the EIHMS. Our goals coincided, and I felt that initiating a Master's level chiropractic programme would be a golden opportunity to help the advancement of the chiropractic profession.

After 5 months of very hard work, the MSc in chiropractic was validated by the University of Surrey in June, 1997. The validation event included representatives from the British Chiropractic Association (BCA), the European Council on Chiropractic Education (ECCE), the medical profession, and university academics. The ECCE was the only chiropractic organisation that offered any input during the development of our programme. They were very helpful in giving advice prior to validation, and I thank them personally.

Validation of a new course is a lengthy and difficult procedure involving stages in which it must be shown that:

1.the course is viable financially

2.the course can be supported by resources

3.the academic content and delivery of the course will be up to university standards. 4.professional regulating bodies are involved in the validation procedure

The validation procedure involves many months of work. There is no guarantee that the course will pass this procedure, especially since universities rarely validate courses proposed by individuals. Thus, it was most gratifying to have achieved validation at the first try. Although I was the only chiropractor involved in developing this programme for validation, it would not have succeeded without the contributions of EIHMS staff members involved in academic planning.

The MSc programme in Chiropractic at the University of Surrey commenced with its first intake of students on 29 September, 1997. We will be welcoming our second intake of students in September, 1998. The aims in establishing this programme were:

1.to develop a chiropractic programme that would meet the high academic and professional international standards already established at chiropractic training institutions around the world 2.to develop Chiropractors formally trained in research 3.to establish a world class research centre and

team within a university for the chiropractic profession.

The research aspect is being emphasised heavily because our professional advances have come about largely due to research. There is no reason that a chiropractic research department within a university cannot be on a par with research departments in other fields.

In order to increase the research profile of our profession, I believe that we must work within the university sector. There are more research facilities, staff and potential for obtaining funding and more influence available within the university system. I believe that eventually it will be easier to attract top class researchers to work at a university than at a private institution. At the University of Surrey, we will be able to do collaborative research projects with Robens Institute, a well known ergonomics and occupational health institute now within the EIHMS, the biomedical engineering department, the nutrition department, and other departments. The University of Surrey already has an excellent reputation in research. This will greatly enhance the chances of successfully developing our research programme in chiropractic.

The professional, educational and academic expertise available at a university, the research possibilities, the opportunities for research funding, will all enrich the students and the profession. In my opinion, the future of chiropractic education, certainly within Europe, lies within the university sector.

Our modular programme is comprised of 20 academic modules, the MSc dissertation and the practical clinic training. Students enrolling on the programme must have a BSc degree that includes basic biomedical subjects, or they must be qualified health care professionals with a sufficient knowledge of basic biomedical subjects. We are taking students who have a BSc degree and then training them for 2 years and 4 months (7 semesters according to the American system of chiropractic education - we have no summer breaks). In addition, all of the students have done a research project as part of their BSc degree. We emphasise differential diagnosis because we are training primary care practitioners, not technicians. Established international standards for chiropractic education will be the guideline for our programme. ECCE accreditation as soon as possible is our goal.

The future for chiropractic in the UK is very bright. The rancour that existed between medicine and chiropractic in the USA does not seem to exist here. Relations and cooperation between the 2 professions seems to be much better in the UK than in the USA. In my opinion, this is due to the excellent work of the BCA in promoting inter-professional cooperation at the practice level and at the scientific/research level. In American terms, the UK has a wide scope of practice that could quite easily be abused. Fortunately, the BCA chiropractors are professionally and politically mature and responsible, so the unscientific extremists in our profession do not have much influence in the UK, nor are they likely to have.

A lot has been accomplished in a short period, but the hard work is just starting. We are beginning small, but will grow. In the spring of 1999, we are moving into a new building that will have an ergonomics laboratory, a gait analysis laboratory and our own chiropractic technique room, in addition to other classrooms. Anyone who visits the UK is welcome to visit the University of Surrey. If you have any comments, positive or negative, contact me.

*Dr. Joseph Morley, DC, PhD,
Course Director*

EIHMS
University of Surrey
Stirling House Campus
Stirling Road
Guildford GU2 5RF
United Kingdom

Telephone: 1483 259746 Fax: 1483 259748 E-mail: j.morley-surrey.ac.uk

Joseph Morley
EIHMS
University of Surrey

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