

Tough Love -- The Way to Go

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I received one of the largest and overwhelmingly supportive reader responses to my May 19th Dynamic Chiropractic column "Health Care Fraud, Medical Incompetence, and/or Stupidity? You Be the Judge." I'm extremely pleased by this response, because I believe that a compassionate yet tough hard-line approach calculated to arouse public interest and outrage will be the most effective way to attain our appropriate acceptance in the health care field.

Chiropractic's greatest advances came after we adopted an assertive posture with a law suit, which sent a message to our adversaries that we were not going to tolerate any more of their disingenuous and unlawful conduct. Our adversaries didn't learn to love us, but they have learned to respect us for our ability to stand up for what is right. We won in the legal arena, but now we need to win in the public arena.

Too often a tough policy is mistaken for being hostile or divisive. We need to dispel this faulty thinking. This is tough love combined with a compassion for truth and the welfare of a society so tragically injured by selfish interest groups that would stoop to lies and distortion for their own gain.

Consider that we are isolated from HMOs and more than 99 percent of the hospitals in America, despite all kinds of studies showing our therapeutic superiority, cost effectiveness, safety, and a three to one superior ratio of satisfaction over medical doctors. Can political medicine be that ignorant? I don't think so, and most people recognize that something is dreadfully wrong with our overall health care system and needs to be corrected.

The most common feedback and frustration I heard from my reader response was how we were allowing such outrageously disingenuous and dishonest medical conduct to go unchallenged. And when we challenge it we too often soften our criticism of our adversaries by calling it unfortunate, misguided, untrue or misunderstood. Why not call a lie a lie if it is a ruthless disregard for the welfare of patients and a contempt for the truth? If it looks, walks, sounds, and smells like a skunk, why not call it a skunk?

I've had many requests for permission to reprint the May 15th Dynamic Chiropractic column, which I gladly give and encourage. One doctor indicated he was going to copy the column and send it to all the U.S. legislators. Another said he wished he had the material a couple weeks earlier so he could have used it when he testified in his state. This is unfortunate because as a spokesperson he should have known this material, which was abundantly documented in my book, *Medicine, Monopolies and Malice*.

I wrote that column primarily for public exposure, urging doctors to send the column to their local radio/TV talk shows and the press as a means of motivating them to interview me on chiropractic. I used the column as a script for a one-hour talk show in Denver. It contains the kind of material that talk shows and the press love. The station loved it and asked me back for another program. We must use solid, reputable, and well-documented sources before using this approach. We need to know that

we are on solid ground, state the facts honestly, objectively and candidly, but not soft pedal our comments or make excuses for our critics and their misinformation.

Medicine is a great profession, but not the only profession. We must work together toward using the best that each has to offer. My criticism is not against the medical profession or the political arm of medicine. The issue is primarily one of integrity in health care and utilizing the safest, most cost effective and therapeutically superior methods first, whatever that care may be.

Some will insist that a tough approach is not the way to win friends. Some chiropractors feel we can accomplish more by a softer and tolerant policy toward organized medicine. We've tried it for 100 years and where has it gotten us? It wasn't until our lawsuit that we made some major strides. We don't have to be hostile, just frank and honest, which is more than can be said for political medicine's record of dealing with chiropractic.

The AMA lobbied vigorously to withdraw funding to the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research after the agency's guidelines on acute low back problems in adults was critical of surgical interventions, and recommended spinal manipulation as "helpful for acute low back problems without radiculopathy when used within the first month of symptoms." The AMA's reaction was to "shoot" the messenger. If this isn't intellectual dishonesty, what is it?

Maybe the "don't make waves" chiropractors can tolerate such outrages, but I cannot. We should urge a congressional investigation for health care fraud by exclusion. Perhaps some doctors don't mind being excluded from more than 99 percent of the hospitals in America, while respectable studies show chiropractic is capable of helping patients with spinal/structural-related ailments far better than MDs: like the studies showing how patients treated with chiropractic were recovering and being discharged from hospitals seven to nine days sooner than patients under medical care for the same conditions.

The chiropractic profession is feeling the impact of this public ignorance, as noted by Donald Petersen's Report of Findings in the June 30, 1997 issue, "Our Last Chance." He estimated that 80 percent of the profession was not doing as well today as 5-10 years ago. I don't know how any chiropractor can sit back and be satisfied. I look at the situation from the point of view of patients being misled and denied the best in health care.

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