

DCs Ascend to Leadership of Multidisciplinary Licensing Boards

Editorial Staff

A "mixed" licensing board is a single, interdisciplinary board which licenses chiropractors, allopaths, osteopaths, podiatrists and other health care providers. There are at least three such licensing boards in the United States: the Illinois Medical Licensing Board, the Kansas State Board of Healing Arts, and the Virginia Board of Medicine.

It used to be that when a chiropractor was appointed to a interdisciplinary state licensing board, the DC was relegated to inconsequential duties. But recently that has begun to change.

Illinois Medical Licensing Board

In Illinois, chiropractic is defined as "the treatment of human ailments without the use of drugs or surgery." Illinois has two boards, one for licensing and one for disciplinary actions. The licensing board, comprised of one chiropractor, one osteopath, and five medical doctors, is responsible for licensing DCs, MDs and DOs.

Dr. Roger Pope is the first chiropractor to ever ascend to the chairmanship of the Illinois Medical Licensing Board. In January 1996 he became the vice-chairman. When the existing chairman (a DO) was not re-appointed, Dr. Pope immediately became the chairman. His position was confirmed by an election of the full board at their June meeting.

As a member of the Illinois Medical Licensing Board for over seven years, Dr. Pope is known as "the man to ask the questions about chiropractic and chiropractic education." Many DCs would be concerned about being a single chiropractor on a "medical board," but Dr. Pope said that he focuses on the interdisciplinary cooperation he sees on the board:

"There is no animosity whatsoever. Our concern is for the licensing for the state of Illinois. We see the people who have had various problems in their past. There aren't as many chiropractic cases as there are medical, but each case is handled the same way. In my experience, a DC has never been treated more harshly than a medical doctor with the same circumstances."

Kansas State Board of Healing Arts

The Kansas State Board of Healing Arts consists of three chiropractors, five allopaths, one podiatrist, three osteopaths, and three lay persons. The first chiropractic president of the board was Rex Wright, DC; Dr. Ronald Zoeller became the second president.

Dr. Zoeller has already served his one-year term as president of the Kansas State Board of Healing Arts. He now holds the title of immediate past president. Having served as a member of a mixed licensing board for six years, Dr. Zoeller commented that it has been a true learning experience to

work with other health care disciplines:

"When the medical establishment wanted to eliminate the mixed board here in Kansas, they held an interim committee to study the issue two years ago. But three of the MD board members and one lay person testified that the mixed board in Kansas was one of the most efficient and effective in the country. We are constantly being asked to appear before the (state) legislature. This is interaction and exposure is really good for the chiropractic profession."

Virginia Board of Medicine

The Virginia Board of Medicine is comprised of 11 allopaths, one chiropractor, one osteopath, one podiatrist, one clinical psychologist, and two public members. Reflecting on his seven years of experience on the Virginia Board, Dr. David Brown listed a number of very compelling arguments for chiropractic membership on mixed licensing boards:

- "We are not discriminated against because we are chiropractors. We are treated very fairly. The medical profession doesn't know a lot about us, but they learn by being a part of our board.
- There is an economy of scale that helps the board function. Most of the serious cases for discipline are not uniquely chiropractic. Being on a board serving a large number of providers, we have the experience and precedence needed.
- There is always a feeling in Virginia that it would be hard to treat chiropractors differently than how medical doctors are treated. Particularly with insurance companies since we are all licensed by the same board.
- In my view it is important for chiropractic to stay part of the overall health care equation. Being part of a mixed board brings the respective leadership together and is another way to stay in the mainstream of health care.
- Most people who serve on a licensing board believe they are there to serve the public. One of the most persuasive arguments for a mixed board is that a different health care professional will judge a chiropractor without any political pressure that might be applied to the board by their own profession. While I don't believe that this happens very often, having other professionals on the board insures that it does not."

Are multidisciplinary licensing boards more feasible than strictly chiropractic boards? Each state needs to make that determination, based on what is the best possible relationship for chiropractic.

More states are beginning to realize the benefits of multidisciplinary licensing boards, and they have good models in the Illinois, Kansas, and Virginia boards.

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