

Future Trends for Chiropractic

Stephen R. Seater

Those of you who have read my column before, know I believe that the future of chiropractic lies in embracing primary care within a holistic paradigm. Traditional medicine is increasingly vulnerable when it comes to the issue of iatrogenic disease and the over-dependence on powerful -- often harmful -- drugs. This fact has been responsible, in large part, for the enormous and growing interest by the public, in alternative and complementary medicine.

Gerald Celente, president of the Trends Research Institute, presented the findings of his newest study, "The New Millennium Chiropractor" at NCMIC's leadership conference, held in Chicago on September 20 and 21. Managed by FCER, Celente's study was funded by NCMIC last spring to give the profession an idea of the trends that are shaping the future of health care and to identify the directions in which chiropractic should move in order to survive.

The Trends Research Institute "forecasts a major health/fitness/nutrition revolution." This revolution is being fueled by the aging baby boomers who dread the possibility of "languishing years away as inmates in nursing homes." This segment of the population will spend increasing amounts of money trying to hold on to their youthful vigor while maintaining and improving their health. Increasing air and water pollution, a second factor, will make boomers and other population segments more health conscious. This trend towards greater health consciousness is of worldwide importance. For chiropractic to position itself to benefit from this continuing revolution, "it is absolutely essential that it broaden and formalize its area of expertise -- even as it expands consciousness of the proven positive effects of its acknowledged musculoskeletal specialty."

Celente and his colleagues have identified several profitable areas of growth in the health care industry that already represent a market in excess of \$30 billion annually. They all fit within the chiropractic paradigm and are in sync with information FCER has on the interests and practices of its supporters. FCER's annual survey shows that 73 percent of its 20,000 best buyers and members engage, at least to some extent, in dietary and nutritional counseling and 30 percent provide some form of weight loss counseling. Most (90 percent) of FCER's supporters also prescribe exercise and counsel on lifestyle changes when necessary.

In his report, Celente stated that such holistic interventions need to be more clearly defined and systematically approached by chiropractic schools. Furthermore, even though many chiropractors enroll in special courses and even attain diplomate status in nutrition and other related areas, the public is unaware of their knowledge. Meanwhile a confused and undirected public does not know where to go for trustworthy, professional advice for weight management, exercise, and lifestyle counseling.

Celente points out the weaknesses of the current sources of information on weight loss. For example, primary care MDs have a maximum of 2.5 hours of formal nutritional training, and despite the evidence that weight loss drugs are not working (and are often harmful), MDs continue to depend

upon drugs as the primary treatment. Dietitians have considerable formal training, but as members of the American Dietetic Association, much of their advice is suspect. The ADA received \$3.2 million in 1995 from Coca-Cola, M&M Mars, McDonald's, Sara Lee, The Sugar Association, and the National Livestock and Meat Board, and their publications and practitioners often reflect a bias in favor of these entities. Furthermore, commercial weight loss programs simply don't work for most people. "As an almost invariable rule, most people (95 percent) gain back all or most of the weight they lose," says Celente. And the success of hospital-based weight loss programs parallels that of the commercial programs. Celente believes that the window of opportunity is open for chiropractic to become more aggressive in helping people seeking professional guidance in how to lose or gain weight, what to eat, and which supplements to take.

Although I believe these are very important findings that merit serious consideration from the leadership within the chiropractic profession, I believe they can be subsumed under the broader category of "natural medicine." As yet, there is little competition in this field. Medical physicians are slow to embrace it, but it is beginning to happen. Naturopaths are only licensed in about 12 states, and American osteopaths have been largely medicalized. Acupuncturists, unless they are MDs, are not physicians and do not possess diagnostic skills.

In my opinion, there are other emerging markets that chiropractors can enter. An important one is ergonomics and industrial consulting. This is related to chiropractic's acknowledged expertise in neuromusculoskeletal conditions and is only just being aggressively promoted within the profession. Another emerging market is life extension. Futurist Barry Minkin, in his book *Future in Sight*, says that life extension is one of the 100 most important global trends for the new millennium. Life extension is really nothing more than proper diet, exercise, stress reduction, and the use of particular nutritional and herbal supplements, the majority of which are nonprescription items. Aside from a few prescription drugs such as deprenyl, there is nothing else in this emerging field that chiropractors cannot become involved with.

If you think this is just a fad, think again. Ronald Klatz, MD, and Robert Goldman, DO, PhD, have just authored a new book, *Stopping the Clock: Seven Anti-Aging Secrets*. Rexall Sundown, Inc., has just launched three new anti-aging products, all of which contain only natural ingredients.

As trained physicians, chiropractors can diagnose as well as treat patients, and they can order lab tests when needed. The other potential competitors such as acupuncturists and herbalists cannot. The time has come to seize the opportunity to become the wellness doctors of the new millennium. Keep in mind, however, what Gerald Celente says about organized medicine. "The medical profession, slow to change its ways as always, only now is beginning to acknowledge the role played in health by nutrition. However, when the medical juggernaut does begin to move, it gathers momentum quickly and steamrolls over everything in its path. The window of opportunity will be open only briefly."

Already, more than 30 medical schools in the U.S. have introduced programs on alternative medicine. Do you think this is merely to learn what these alternatives are all about? Not on your life. Organized medicine sees billions of dollars slipping through its fingers and wants to co-opt what it can. MDs are already learning about acupuncture, how to manipulate, and how to counsel patients on better diet and nutrition.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that medicine can't mobilize its huge PR apparatus to capture the holistic market. The AMA's *JAMA* has a circulation of 700,000, making it the largest medical journal in

the world. They publish numerous medical books, booklets, and flyers for the public. The AMA has a weekly newspaper called American Medical News, and its PR department sends out 4,000 news releases each week to journalists nationwide. Each week, the AMA floods some 350 TV outlets with video news releases via satellite, and sends some 5,000 radio stations a one minute medical report daily. Once they jump on the natural medicine bandwagon, look out.

Fortune 500 companies know that the future belongs to those who can identify emerging trends and seize them. Both Gerald Celente and Barry Minkin are Fortune 500 consultants because the trends they identify help these companies maintain their competitive edge. One thing is certain: a global trend is in the making, which is propelling millions of people away from traditional allopathic solutions towards wellness and holism. Chiropractic, with its patient-centered paradigm and philosophy of wellness, should logically be riding the crest of this new wave. It is time for the profession to wake up and return to its roots. The market for natural medicine will grow dramatically in the foreseeable future.

Stephen Seater, MA, CAE
FCER Executive Director

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