

The Pain, the Price, the Passion

A FINAL LOOK AT OUR FIRST CENTURY

Donald M. Petersen Jr., BS, HCD(hc), FICC(h), Publisher

Looking back over our first 100 years, I see my father. He became a chiropractor because he believed in chiropractic. His father (my grandfather) was a DC, so my father was involved with chiropractic from his earliest days.

Neither my father, nor my grandfather would necessarily be considered chiropractic pioneers by most, but their struggles represent to me the reality of chiropractic's first century.

Prejudice and misunderstanding were the common enemies of the profession back then. Chiropractic just wasn't considered mainstream health care. The media largely ignored the profession, the worst form of insult. No one then could have imagined then the kind of positive exposure chiropractic would get: the RAND study, AHCPR guidelines, the Manga report, let alone our own chiropractic documentary.

But the saddest part of that issue was the PAIN of not being able to care for those who desperately needed chiropractic care. Seeing the countless unnecessary surgeries (many of which failed) was too disheartening for words. The drug companies were coming into power and everyone's faith was misplaced in little pills.

It is difficult to imagine how different life would be today, particularly health care, if the medical profession had been openminded enough to accept all forms of health care that provided patient benefit, and if science had begun inclusively studying diverse forms of care. But politics and insecurities intervened instead. Now people are faced with a health care system that they aren't happy with and can't afford.

In what may be the sole preservation of vitalism in the Western world, DCs in the first century paid a heavy PRICE. My father treated every DC as family. It was easy to know which chiropractors were committed. In the face of so much adversity, you were either committed or you chose a different profession.

Being jailed was not the only hardship faced by our chiropractic forefathers. Not being allowed to join clubs, refer patients and many other acts of prejudice were the norm. Before insurance inclusion, chiropractors worked long hours, treating many patients for small amounts of money (or farm products in trade). No one spoke of making a million dollars. They talked about helping a little boy the MDs couldn't.

Even until recently, the one attribute that has separated chiropractic from every other health care profession, and most other professions, has been passion. The reason chiropractic patients have such great loyalty to chiropractic is because chiropractors are so enthusiastic about caring for their patients. Chiropractic was more than a profession, it was a way of life. I can still remember my father

caring for my friends when they were hurt on the playground or not feeling well. It wasn't just what he did, it was what he was.

But with time, one hopes, comes maturity. As my own children grow, I know they will face many challenges, some of which will be different from those I encountered. And yet, I can't help but believe that I have learned a few lessons that can benefit them.

While today's DCs aren't being jailed for practicing medicine without a license, they are being locked out of managed care programs by gatekeepers. Patient testimonials, no longer given much weight when it comes to proving effectiveness, have made way for valid scientific studies. Nor is it enough to win lawsuits. We seek now to influence legislators, insurance executives and decision makers.

But the attributes that carried the early chiropractic pioneers still apply. As I have often told my sons, "The one who works the hardest usually wins."

Yes, it will be painful to continue to see patients suffer because some gatekeeper doesn't like or understand chiropractic. And it will take new ways to fight this injustice.

Yes, you will be called on to spend more time as a "chiropractic activist." Getting the public to understand is still the most important thing we can do. This happens one-on-one, one person at a time. You will have to take the message of the benefits of chiropractic beyond your patients and into your community.

Unfortunately, passion isn't something you can teach. You either have it or you don't. Perhaps all of the frustrations of health care reform have severely dampened your passion for chiropractic. Could this apply to you? If so, you need to make a commitment to spend some time before the year ends to recharge your batteries, regain your enthusiasm and get back on point. If you aren't ready to face a new year, it's time to get ready.

Take a seminar from someone who can help you recommit yourself. Take time to plan this next year with your spouse. Set goals; get excited.

The upcoming year isn't some monster waiting to destroy you. It is another year full of obstacles and opportunities. The difference between the two is the effort you put in: your pain, your price -- your passion.

DMP Jr.

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