

Lessons Learned in the Fight for Chiropractic Rights

Editorial Staff

In Part I of this exclusive interview (please see "International Sports Science and Chiropractic's Role" in the January 14, 1994 issue), Leroy Perry, DC, spoke of the impact of sports science on chiropractic practice. In this final part of the interview, Dr. Perry discusses how the lessons learned in the struggle to overcome medical opposition to chiropractic treatment of athletes during the Olympic Games not only affected the practice of chiropractic, but also our attitudes about health care reform.

Dr. Leroy Perry has long been known for treating athletes and entertainers. What isn't as well known is how his experiences in battling the medical establishment to gain official recognition for chiropractors to treat Olympic athletes has led him to create a model for the chiropractic profession to follow in addressing the issues raised by health care reform.

"DC": How have your experiences working with sports scientists in the Eastern Bloc countries helped your practice and advanced chiropractic?

Dr. Perry: As a result of these experiences, many positive things happened. The Eastern Bloc sports scientists were always looking for ways to save money and yet provide the best treatment possible for their athletes. As a chiropractor, it was next to impossible to get medical institutions to take us seriously. As soon as they found out a chiropractor had invented a product or developed a technique, the estimated research costs escalated 200-300 percent.

Positions offered by institutions and organizations would evaporate once they discovered that I was a chiropractor, and not a medical doctor. I soon realized it wasn't just the AMA or the medical establishment that was against chiropractic, it was our entire corrupt health care delivery system, our educational and/or university system. Their so called research organizations were open only to special interest groups and those who were linked by political affiliation.

You could not count on them. They had vested interests in making sure that only traditional medicine reigned. My job was clear to me: take chiropractic ideas, philosophy, and methods to those individuals or groups that had only one vision -- to be the best.

That is how I became so involved with the Soviets and other Eastern Bloc countries. Almost all my inventions resulted from this co-venture spirit. The Eastern Bloc offered me an opportunity to do the research and test my inventions when I could not get medical organizations, universities, etc., to even look at them.

"DC": A small nonpartisan group of specialists were asked to present a statement of position on allied

health to the White House. We were told you participated.

Dr. Perry: Yes, I was asked to participate in that think tank. The objective was to come up with position statement to help establish a nonpolitical basis for allied health practitioners, which would be presented to Hillary Clinton. I co-authored the statement, which was endorsed by the group and presented. I also authored a format for President Clinton's Health, Fitness, and Education Program, which was also presented. As we had won a place for chiropractic profession within the U.S. Olympic program, I felt the same basic position had to be taken to win a place in the Clinton health plan.

"DC": What was that position?

Dr. Perry: The method used to achieve a place for chiropractic within the U.S. Olympic program was based upon one major issue: fighting for the rights of athletes to have freedom to choose what kind of doctor they wanted treated them, whether podiatrist, osteopath or chiropractor. During this time, the AMA's Committee on Quackery was in full force. Their job was to discredit and eliminate all those who threatened the AMA.

The fact that these activities were pulling positive chiropractic press, and that the U.S. athletes had petitioned the president of the United States to have me added to the U.S. Olympic medical staff infuriated them. I felt like public enemy number one.

The only way we could beat them was by using the Constitution of the United States. It was the athletes' right as American citizens, their civil liberties, that the American Medical Association was tampering with, and that is why they lost. It just so happened that I was a chiropractor and they wanted me to be their doctor and I was willing to do so.

When the Olympic athletes originally petitioned the president of the United States to have me included on the team, I made them take my name off and write instead, "a doctor of chiropractic." The AMA could counter if one individual was to be named, but not as easily for an entire profession.

That's something they didn't count on. The rest is history. We won. I ended up officially representing the U.S. in 1980 as the doctor for the U.S. Bobsled Federation. During that first Olympics, I treated athletes from some 30 countries and ended up as an official Olympic member of the British Olympic team. Since that time, I and other DCs have participated in every single Olympic games in some official capacity.

"DC": How have these experiences influenced how you perceive chiropractic's role in health care reform?

Dr. Perry: We have matured as a profession. We have achieved the right to stand up in any arena, any place on earth beside any other health profession.

We have unique skills, which we as a profession have often proven. We can provide a cost effective method of health care without side effects, and the escalating iatrogenic costs created by medicine.

It is time for the chiropractic profession to throw down the gauntlet and fight for what our forefathers fought so hard to create. They endured sacrifices so that we could learn; they endured ridicule so that we might realize our importance to humanity -- so we could evolve.

We must fight, but no longer as a single profession trying to etch out a little respect and acceptance

from the medical profession with hat in hand. But rather as equals, we must stand erect and tall.

We must remember and realize that our position in this new health care reform is not as one profession but as a team player. We must unite with all other allied professions, nurses, podiatrist, osteopaths, optometrist, psychologist, physical therapist, acupuncturist, homeopaths and all others. Our voice must not be heard singly but in concert.

We must demand, engineer, and create an atmosphere that dictates equal pay for equal services, and freedom of choice for our patients. It is their freedom as American citizens and our freedom as doctors that must not be over looked. Our civil liberties and their civil liberties are being challenged.

It will not be the American Medical Association that wins if we fail, it will be the American people who lose. We are the American people, you, your children, your grandchildren. They represent the future generations.

What we do this day will establish the format for their future. We must succeed, we must support the American Chiropractic Association, the International Chiropractors Association, the Chiropractic Centennial Foundation and all the other chiropractic organizations that create our infrastructure. But these organizations must have clear purpose and be united to reinforce all other allied health fields, so that our voices may be heard in total concert as one.

"DC": What you say is compelling, but do you really believe Washington will listen?

Dr. Perry: Washington will listen -- every senator, member of Congress and the White House will listen. But it is up to us to fight for what we believe in.

Look to our chiropractic associations, each county, each state, each national group. Align this effort with other allied professions and we can't lose.

America was founded on the belief that all persons are created equal. It's time we in the chiropractic profession start acting like it. We must fight for our civil rights, equal care, equal service and equal pay for those who provide it. That is our destiny we must fulfill.

It is up to us to unite this unified health care front. It will take a strong will, strong mind, and extreme effort -- we must not quit. We must fight for our rights and our childrens' future.

"DC": Thank you Dr. Perry.

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