

Chiropractic Goes to Slovakia

SLOVAKIAN CHIROPRACTIC ASSOCIATION BORN

Craig Morris, DC

On January 1, 1993, Czechoslovakia peacefully split into two countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, in what is now known as the "velvet divorce."

With the birth of their new country, the Slovak people found themselves in control of their own future for the first time. However, after centuries of domination by neighboring countries, independence and self-determination are ideas uncommon to this nation of five million people.

At a time when United States is attempting to socialize its private health care system, it is truly ironic to note that Slovakia, along with many other Eastern European countries, is attempting to privatize their socialized health care system. It would seem that this unique timing of opposing directions might allow both groups to learn from each other, and ultimately arrive at a relatively similar health care system.

For more than 40 years, manual medicine has existed in the Czechoslovak region. The founders of this specialty are professors Karel Lewit and Vladimar Janda. The work of these renowned authors was initially inspired by a chiropractor, practicing in Prague in the early 1950s. Professors Janda and Lewit combined the research of various medical and osteopathic researchers around the world with their own studies and have adapted many of the same basic techniques on which chiropractic is based. Their former students are today physicians who specialize in manual medicine in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the surrounding regions. These specialists have recently formed, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia respectively, the Associations of Myoskeletal Medicine. These new groups will assist their respective governments in the organization of standards of practice and reimbursement in a fee-for-service privatized health care system.

My wife, Jana, is a native of the Slovak capital of Bratislava. Located approximately 25 miles east of Vienna, Austria, along the Danube River, Bratislava was initially a Roman outskirt fortress. Today more than 500,000 people live in Bratislava. My wife's infectious zeal for her native country has been deeply seeded in the hearts of our children and me.

The Slovakian Chiropractic Association was born out of the passion for the Slovakian people and for the chiropractic profession. Our goals are to establish chiropractic within the Slovakian national health care system, institute licensure, and professional and reimbursement guidelines. We hope to reach out and work with various health care specialties in Slovakia, the neighboring European chiropractic associations, and the members of the World Federation of Chiropractic.

With these goals in mind, it was an honor for my wife and me to meet Dr. Lewit and his wife at their home outside of Prague on August 8, 1993. We had the opportunity to discuss chiropractic and the evolution of manual medicine in Eastern Europe. The Lewits were indeed gracious hosts.

Dr. Lewit's text, *Manipulative Therapy in Rehabilitation of the Locomotor System*, is brilliant and should be mandatory reading for all students and doctors of chiropractic.

Later that day, we met with Dr. and Mrs. Jiri Marek in Prague. Dr. Marek is the founder of Monada, the first private health care clinic in the Czech Republic. Dr. Marek is a former student of Lewit/Janda and encompasses holistic health care in his approach to neuromusculoskeletal rehabilitation.

On August 10, 1993, I met with six leaders of the Slovakian Association of Myoskeletal Medicine in Bratislava. Our host, Dr. Jan Zvonar, is the first president of this new association. Also present was Jitka Durianova, MD, who has taught the Lewit/Janda technique to physicians throughout Eastern Europe for many years.

During our meeting, I quoted a recent speech of Dr. Mikhail Mikeev, chief medical officer, Office of Occupational Health, World Health Organization, in his May 1993 address to the World Federation of Chiropractic (WFC) in London. In his speech, Dr. Mikeev clearly stated the vital role of chiropractic as a part of the world health care body. Together, the cooperative efforts of chiropractic and medicine are necessary in containing the world wide epidemic of musculoskeletal disability.

After discussing the history of chiropractic and explaining our education and credentialing system, we were astonished to find so many common areas and beliefs we share in our approach to health care. As to our differences, we agreed that these represented potential areas of growth and approached them in a respectful manner. Our meeting that day was very positive, and I believe the beginning of a mutual and beneficial collaboration for the ultimate benefit of the people of Slovakia.

The following day, as guests of Dr. Zvonar, my wife and I visited one of the most famous health resorts in Slovakia in the town of Piestany. For hundreds of years, tens of thousands of patients suffering from various debilitating musculoskeletal conditions have benefited from the sulfur rich hot mud baths, hot springs, and physical therapy programs at this resort.

We found the physicians of myoskeletal medicine in the Czech and Slovak regions to be gracious and open to chiropractic. We hope that these doctors can be guests in the United States so that they can see chiropractic institutions and clinics on a first hand basis.

Certainly chiropractic is now rapidly expanding beyond its initial geographic borders. To succeed in this expansion we must support with time and money these pioneering efforts. All students and doctors of chiropractic can help by becoming a member of any of the international associations of the World Federation of Chiropractic. Is there any doubt that successfully established chiropractic programs abroad will ultimately have a positive rebound affect in the countries where our profession is already well established? Such an investment will invariably pay off in dividends in the relief of worldwide human suffering for future generations.

We would like to thank several doctors for their assistance in the success of our trip: Dr. Craig Liebensen for his coordination of our meeting with his friends and mentors, professors Janda and Lewit. (Incidentally, look for Dr. Liebensen's upcoming text on rehabilitation which includes chapters from both scholars.); Dr. Edith Haynes of Cleveland Chiropractic College for education materials and advice; Dr. Reed Phillips of Los Angeles College of Chiropractic for his advice, and to my dear friend, Dr. Betty Ciuchta for her initial inspiration and guidance.

For those doctors of chiropractic who are of Slovakian ancestry, or would like to support our

organization, please contact the Slovakian Chiropractic Association at (310) 530-4460 for details regarding membership. For information regarding the World Federation of Chiropractic, call (416) 484-9978.

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