

Chiropractic Ethics: Part V -- Hurting Us All

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I don't get what you're getting at. Are you saying all chiropractors are crooks?

In formal written forums, such as a newspaper column, it's usual to say things that are really simple in circumspect ways. We read through articles, to "get the point." We interpret what we see in language we understand, preferably simple, emotional language.

Among the characteristics of the ways people tend to respond and think are: "Most people want to feel that issues are simple rather than complex, want to have their prejudices confirmed, want to feel that they 'belong,' with the implication that others do not, and need to pinpoint an enemy to blame for their frustrations."¹

"She's saying we're crooks." No, I'm not saying that. I hope you look at my articles and see so.

Some of you want to know where I'm coming from to be writing with such urgency and emotion. Why am I doing this? It's because I've been hurt by situations in chiropractic that are less than ethical.

Potential patients don't trust me when they hear the word chiropractic. When I promote, I have to spend too much time explaining that I am not like those other chiropractors. My business is drowning in paperwork generated by insurance companies who can't distinguish between me and the unethical, overutilizing chiropractors.

I'm hurt because another DC friend is being tormented in his associateship. They're having a brush with the law that is too close for comfort.

I look around and see situations all over. It seems to me that the problems of ethical dilemmas in chiropractic are hurting us all.

We can't handle ethical dilemmas in chiropractic better until we can think about the subject better. Our thinking is muddled.

A keen observer of human discussion has derived general principles about things people do when their thinking is muddled:

"People are often unable to distinguish what is relevant from what is irrelevant.

"People are easily diverted from the specific issue at hand.

"They rarely think carefully before they speak, but allow their feelings, prejudices, biases, likes, dislikes, hopes, and frustrations to supersede careful thinking."²

For example, I commonly find that when we try to think about or talk about chiropractic ethics our minds leap to sex. It's because of the world we live in. As Harold Kushner pointed out, "Vice squads and 'morals charges' deal with sexual matters, as if there were no other ways of being vicious or immoral except sexual ones."³

We're vaguely aware that other ethical principles exist, but we're hazy and confused. It's natural to be this way now. Anne Davis, a world renown health care ethicist, points out the problem when she's discussing practical ethics as a type of social reality. She says it "involves conditions, institutions, laws or human attitudes that combine changeability and rigidity in an unstable and, to some extent, inscrutable pattern."⁴

Also, it's hard to tell the difference between morality and social convention. What our profession has lost by having spinal screenings so widely used is certainly a subject worthy for discussion. Objections to them are mostly about image, status, dignity or authority, rather than lying, cheating, stealing or harming people. It has more to do with mores, what's right and wrong in social convention, than morality.

Pursuing better chiropractic ethics must go beyond the questions raised by wrongful sex or tacky promotional methods. This series of articles is to explore topical problems in practical chiropractic ethics, find connections and explain them.

As I tried to talk about ethical matters with my friends and others, it became clear to me that we are all in darkness and confusion. Our inner worlds of mind and emotion surge fitfully. We have difficulty focusing, difficulty guiding ourselves in the dark. The purpose of this series of articles is to shed some light where there is darkness.

References

1. Gula R: Nonsense: How to Overcome It. Stein and Day, pp 15, 1979.
2. Ibid, pp 15.
3. Kushner, H: When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough. Summit Books, pp 80, 1986.
4. Davis A, Aroskar M: Ethical Dilemmas and Nursing Practice. Appleton and Lange, pp 97, 1991.

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