

Visibility Demands Accountability

Kerwin Winkler

Sometimes we get so close to the issues that we lose perspective on what has transpired relative to the public perceptions of chiropractic. This issue was brought home to me the other day when a patient of mine, Mr. Clark Swisher, who happened to be president of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics in 1978-79, and a member of the Olympic committee from 1975-84, told me about the positive impact the involvement of chiropractic has had on the performance of the Olympic athletes. Additionally, he commented on the professional job the chiropractic practitioners have done since becoming members of the Olympic health team.

I wonder how many of our colleagues would have dared to dream 30 years ago that in the late 1980s, members of the chiropractic profession would be included in the care of athletes during the Olympic games.

We are included because someone dared to dream. Some of our leaders had the foresight to see beyond the moment, to envision a time when their dreams would be a reality. It took a clear vision to make it happen.

Chiropractic is moving at an accelerated pace, so rapidly that many of us won't be able to keep up. Fortunately, there are dedicated groups in every aspect of our profession willing to dream the dreams -- then make them happen. We are fortunate to have a dedicated group of young researchers who are forging new dimensions for chiropractic in research, while maintaining a position of equality with the other research disciplines.

Our ACA Sports Council is making great strides and will eventually create the climate for chiropractic inclusion in all sports -- not only inclusion, but inclusion with an ethical base.

Our public relations is gaining in popularity and credibility and will eventually become the "source" for all chiropractic-related information.

Our academic institutions are developing relationships with universities and breaking the isolation barrier.

Our political advisers are now of the caliber to bring together, for the first time, the political leadership of the chiropractic profession and the political leaders who make the crucial legislative decisions that affect our daily lives.

Chiropractic is maturing and coming of age. With maturity and recognition comes critical review and challenge. We cannot expect chiropractic to gain popularity and recognition without the "responsibility" that goes with the territory.

In just the past several years of my involvement on the board of governors of the ACA and serving as

public relations liaison, I have seen Nick Athens interviewed and treating Joe Montana on the Super Bowl game; James Drury, the "Virginian," interviewed by major magazines and newspapers highlighting the "senior citizen" benefits of chiropractic care; a major interview on CNN following the Wilk et al. suit between Dr. Louis Sportelli and Keith Johnson, the attorney for the AMA; Star magazine allocating a full page to the ACA's 10 Best Posture award contest; and major newspapers carrying stories on chiropractic and the positive aspects of this alternative health care. This past year alone, Mr. Irv Davis has arranged for more than 300 television and radio interviews with targeted ACA members, as a result of our newly-gained credibility and recognition.

On one hand we have made great public strides and, yet, we should not forget the admonition by Mr. George McAndrews concerning the Wilk et al. decision. "The decision handed down did not prove the effectiveness of chiropractic; it merely said that the AMA was guilty of an illegal act." It is imperative that we continue the research to prove the efficacy and cost effectiveness of chiropractic.

The British medical study published June 2, 1990 has literally jolted the medical community and those involved in low back pain research. Again, this is only one study, and despite the fact that it may have some design weaknesses, it again demonstrated the fact that when objectively reviewed and compared, chiropractic has continually demonstrated a 2:1 for effectiveness; and the cost comparisons validate the savings realized by chiropractic versus other forms of treatment.

With this visibility and acceptance comes accountability. Are we ready and willing to impose high standards on our profession? Are we ready and willing to engage in scientific validation of our hypothesis? Are we ready and willing to accept the criticism as well as the accolades? The other word missing in the "ready and willing" part of the equation is "able." I know we are capable of meeting the challenge, but are we ready and willing?

Chiropractic has reached a fork in the road. If you don't know where you are going, any road will do. I am optimistic enough to believe that we do know where we are going and realistic enough to believe that the decision will be an easy one. I am also confident enough to believe that the leadership of this profession will put personalities and politics aside and place the future of this profession first.

Now, more than ever, chiropractic needs men and women of vision, courage, integrity, and intelligence, in order to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Ronald Reagan once said of Congress, "They are like a baby's alimentary canal -- great appetite on one end, no responsibility on the other." Unlike the baby Ronald Reagan spoke of, chiropractic, as the baby of the health care delivery system, has the responsibility to meet the challenges of tomorrow and deal with the unsettling forces of change, to emerge in this next century as the profession of accountability.

There is nothing chiropractic cannot achieve working together, and nothing it will achieve working alone. The court of public judgment will make the ultimate decision of whether chiropractic is found guilty or innocent; and that verdict will depend on our individual and collective willingness to demonstrate our visibility and accountability. I am confident the decision will be in our favor.

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