

Three Michigan Associations Merge

MICHIGAN CHIROPRACTIC SOCIETY CONSOLIDATION COMPLETE

Editorial Staff

Storm clouds had been brewing over the chiropractic profession in Michigan since the adoption of the Public Health Statute Revision Project in 1978 that revised the Michigan Public Health Code and narrowed the chiropractic scope of practice. "There was an awareness that the profession in Michigan was declining," said Dr. Kirk J. Steketee, former president of the Michigan Alliance of Chiropractic Physicians and president of the Michigan Chiropractic Society since 1990. "It wasn't only the narrowing of the scope, it was also the beginning of a power struggle between the conservative and liberal camps. Looking back at it now, it all seemed so unnecessary.

"The profession was losing credibility with the state legislature, third-party payers, and the public. Each of the chiropractic associates in the state were fragmented and competing with each other for recognition, credibility, membership, and dues. We realized that we needed to change public policy and perceptions. We had a responsibility to our patients and the profession, so we began to put aside our philosophical differences," Dr. Steketee said.

"Chiropractic needed to unify in Michigan because we probably have the most restrictive law in the nation," said Dr. Royce Newman, former president of the Michigan State Chiropractic Association. "Insurance companies and medical doctors were having a hay-day bashing our profession. With four chiropractic organizations, each trying to tell the legislature they represented chiropractic in Michigan, we became a joke to our elected officials. Chiropractic clout did not exist and unification seemed like a pipe dream," Dr. Newman said.

"Through the '70s and '80s, chiropractic in Michigan regressed politically and economically," said Dr. John O'Connor, former president of the Michigan Fellowship of Straight Chiropractors and chairman of the board of the Michigan Chiropractic Society. "The people of this state were not being well served by our professional representation. The Michigan chiropractic community failed to provide a legal sphere that would allow the people to use chiropractic as needed. Each chiropractic organization had specialized in cutting each others legislative throats, but had failed to enhance their own position. Chiropractic had lost its credibility in the state of Michigan.

"Practitioners were disgusted with the situation and, in spite of having four major state organizations, most chiropractors did not pay dues to any state organization. Unification meant that legislation could be passed that would ensure that the people of this state had the right to chiropractic care. It also would ensure that our patients who secured some kind of health care coverage would find chiropractic care available as part of their rightful health care benefits," said Dr. O'Connor.

By the spring of 1987, the leaders of the various groups began discussions on how they could form a closer alliance. On June 6-7, representatives of the ACA-aligned Michigan State Chiropractic Association (MSCA), the Michigan Alliance of Chiropractic Physicians (MACP), and the FSCO-aligned Michigan Fellowship of Straight Chiropractors (MFSC) gathered for a "summit meeting" to chart a

strategy on how to carry out their long-term objectives. Each of the groups had four representatives at the meeting. The ICA-aligned Michigan Chiropractic Council was also represented at the summit meeting, but declined to support the unification process.

Patrick J. Callihan was selected to serve as arbitrator/moderator at the summit meeting and consultant to the groups during merger negotiations. Callihan brought an impressive list of health care credentials to the negotiations, including chairman of the Multi-Facility Committee of the American Health Care Association, a member of the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Skilled Nursing Home Advisory Committee, and a member of the State Rate-Setting Committee for Nursing Homes. "A key point in the merger negotiations was that the moderator was neither a chiropractor nor a national chiropractic figure and was mutually agreed upon by the presidents of each organization," said Dr. Steketee. "There was another very important quality that Mr. Callihan brought to the negotiations -- an admiration and respect for chiropractic. He added the all important patient perspective; he kept the patient first."

Establishing clear goals and objectives for the merger negotiations was perhaps one of the most difficult tasks. Primary objectives established at the summit meeting included: The formation of a merger steering committee composed of the presidents of each of the four groups, procedures for informing the memberships of the respective associations of the progress of the negotiations, selection of an interim name, preparation of by-laws, financing mechanisms, a long-range public relations program, and establishment of committees.

Unification discussions continued following the summit meeting and on March 3-5, 1988, in an atmosphere of mutual cooperation and respect, intensive negotiations began to formulate a specific merger plan for submission to the executive boards of the participating associations. The group selected Michigan Chiropractic Society as the name of the unified organization. The first document developed at that meeting was a "Declaration of Unity" that read: "We, the undersigned presidents and representatives do hereby declare our intent to unify the chiropractic profession in the state of Michigan. We have solemnly engaged the task of restoring our professional strength by designing a single, strong, and influential chiropractic organization. We, therefore, dedicate ourselves to that end through the Michigan Chiropractic Society." It was signed on March 3, 1988 by the presidents and representatives of the three groups. "Once that document was in place and agreed upon, the consolidation agreement was a natural product of this feeling," Dr. Steketee said.

A second document adopted was a purpose for the new organization that would include all the philosophies of the chiropractic profession and provide a unified direction for the future. It reads: The purpose of the Michigan Chiropractic Society is the perpetuation of the chiropractic profession as a separate and distinct branch of the healing arts. Central to our purpose is the continued investigation, analysis, and research into the ongoing relationship and clinical presentation of the vertebral subluxation complex and the subluxation's consequent effects on other body parts and systems. It is the intent of the Michigan Chiropractic Society to recognize all philosophies within the chiropractic profession. We further recognize all chiropractic schools, accrediting agencies, and national organizations.

A mission statement was then formulated. The statement adopted reads: "The mission of the Michigan Chiropractic society is to protect and enhance the chiropractic profession through organizational leadership and promotion of the chiropractic discipline and practice."

Additionally, executive board composition, association bylaws, and membership dues were discussed. "My major concern when we talked of unity was that we should have a set of bylaws that we agreed to abide by before we actually formed the consolidation," said Dr. Newman. "It also seemed good to me that certain individuals would agree to various positions of authority and power for predetermined lengths of time as a condition of consolidation. Since the former MSCA represented the largest group at the time, we basically used those bylaws, with a few modifications, to allow the transition to occur, with the new MSCA president and treasurer carrying on as president and treasurer of the consolidated group," Dr. Newman stated. Dr. Steketee added, "This was perhaps the most difficult part of the consolidation for the smaller groups because it required the suppression of egos and extending a trusting hand."

One final document needed preparation before the unification process could begin, the "Agreement and Plan of Consolidation." The 23-page document spelled out the transfer of assets, liabilities assumed, liabilities not assumed, tax exempt status, maintenance of legislative counsel and employees, continuous membership benefit plans, and board directors and officers.

According to terms of the agreement, the vice president of the MSCA, Dr. Robert Ducharme, would serve as the Society's first president; the president of the MACP, Dr. Kirk Steketee, would serve as first vice president; and the president of the MFSCO, Dr. John O'Connor, would assume the role of second vice president until the first board meeting after the 1990 membership meeting.

With the groundwork laid, the plan was ready to submit to the general membership of each organization.

At a joint business meeting on April 24, 1988, the unification plan was taken to the memberships of the MACP and the MFSCO. Both organizations voted unanimously to ratify the plan and turn over all assets to the new MCS that was born at that point. Finally, the goal of a unified chiropractic profession envisioned by representatives of the three associations in 1986 became a reality on July 28, 1988 when delegates to the MSCA state convention voted to accept the merger plan. At a unity banquet confirming the new Michigan Chiropractic Society, Dr. Robert Ducharme, former MSCA vice president and the first president of the Society serving from 1988-1990, said, "This is a new beginning for a new era in chiropractic history."

The official merger documents were signed by representatives of the three groups on July 30, 1988 and included provisions for dissolution up to July 31, 1991. Since at no time was there an effort to dissolve the society prior to or including that date, on July 31, 1991 the consolidation was completed and the goal of a unified chiropractic profession in Michigan was accomplished.

"Care was taken in each step of the process to ensure that encumbrances and obstacles were identified and rectified to allow the profession to form a strong, unified single professional society," said Dr. Steketee. "We put aside our differences and found that the past concerns of the groups held little credibility in light of the problems facing the survival of our profession in Michigan. We worked long hours to find the ways and means of joining together so that the organization could serve the needs of all chiropractors in Michigan."

"The merger committee recognized that all factions needed fair representation," said Dr. O'Connor. "Unique safeguards were built into the bylaws of the society to allow minority views to be represented. This is truly a Michigan chiropractic organization for all Michigan chiropractors. In the past, our major error was our failure to understand the intent of a chiropractic law. The law is not to be a study in

philosophy. The chiropractic law should not dictate what a practitioner should or should not do in their office. The law should be an arena in which various philosophies or disciplines may practice."

"The political and economic situation for the chiropractic profession in Michigan had deteriorated for years, creating an environment in which chiropractic patients were being denied the same benefits given to other health care groups," said Dr. Newman. "The leaders of the state chiropractic organizations became aware that one strong, united profession was the only answer. Clout is now a fact for chiropractic in Michigan through the Michigan Chiropractic Society."

It was a pleasure and an honor to be the first president of the new group," said Dr. Ducharme, "but along with that came a lot of challenges that were magnified because of the political pressures that were brought upon us to succeed. Our hope was that by consolidating our efforts, we could focus on the power needed to change the attitudes and perceptions many people had about chiropractic in this state. As a result of the consolidation, we have been able to make a lot of gains with the insurance industry, in the legislative arena, and have been able to do a lot of positive public relations projects for chiropractic. In the future, we still need to work on improving our insurance relationships and some positive public relations programs to further educate the public about the benefits of chiropractic," Dr. Ducharme said.

At its August 1, 1991 meeting, the Michigan Chiropractic Society Board of Directors reaffirmed the spirit and resolve of its incorporators and adopted a resolution memorializing the agreement and plan of consolidation.

Today, the MCS has a statewide membership of 750, and five full-time staff members. The fruits of unification are just starting. At the time of the merger, the only gubernatorial appointment from the chiropractic profession was, by statute, the Michigan Board of Chiropractic. Since the merger, MCS members have been appointed by the governor and currently serve on the Workers' Compensation Review Board and Health Occupations Council. A forthcoming appointment from the chiropractic profession will be made to the Spinal Cord/Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Committee. The society maintains a formal liaison relationship with the State of Michigan, Department of Social Services and Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan. The society also has a Chiropractic Review Services Agreement with the Blues. "All of this would not have been possible without the merger," said Dr. Steketee.

Unification has not only benefited the chiropractic profession in Michigan, but, more importantly, chiropractic patients. "The law should protect the public from harm, as well as protect the right of the public to have their choice of health care. Patients should have the right to choose whether they want medical, osteopathic, chiropractic, podiatric care, etc. They should also have the right to choose the type of chiropractic care they want. I believe that unification, respect, and integrity the society has brought to the profession are initiating those safeguards," said Dr. O'Connor.

Copies of the documents mentioned in this article are available:

Marcia Ditchie
Communications Manager
Michigan Chiropractic Society
6215 West St. Joseph Highway (#207 W)
Lansing, Michigan 48917

