

## Food for Thought 2004: Improving Our Public Relations

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I just returned from working at the World Triathlon Championships in New Zealand. For the five days leading up to the weekend races, many of the more than 270 U.S. athletes (in divisions ranging from "juniors" to "over 70" and "athletes with disabilities" to "professionals") received care from the U.S. medical team. The busiest and most popular doctor was sports chiropractor Ernie Ferrel.

While going through my mail upon my return, I came across the Dec. 15, 2003 issue of *Dynamic Chiropractic*, which had a front-page article about chiropractic and public relations.<sup>1</sup> The article discussed the fact that only 10 percent of Americans see chiropractors, and that we continue to get plenty of bad press. It introduced a new campaign that united members of a number of groups, including the ACA, ICA, National Board of Chiropractic Examiners, Association of Chiropractic Colleges, *Chiropractic Economics*, and this publication, among others, to support one advertising message: "See a chiropractor."

As I continued through my mail, I read an article on the best-selling information booklet for patients with spinal problems.<sup>2</sup> Robin McKenzie's *Treat Your Own Back* is in its seventh edition and has sold an astounding 2.5 million copies (and counting).

On the other side of the coin is the continuing avalanche of bad publicity. Here in California, chiropractors became the target of a workers' compensation crisis, based on marketing ads in chiropractic publications that blatantly boasted how chiropractors could exploit the system. In an article earlier this year, the current ICA president wrote about signing up patients for 40-visit plans over 90 days or 80-visit plans over a one-year period!<sup>3</sup>

The reason Dr. Ferrel was so busy at the United States Triathlon medical clinic was because he significantly and rapidly reduced pain and solved problems. Until we bury the "wellness/maintenance" B.S. and ostracize those chiropractors and marketers who propagate such fraud, we will continue to have a huge public relations problem. If wellness and maintenance care is so valuable, where is the proof in peer-reviewed neutral journals; where are the studies from independent researchers, absent of funding, publication and reviewer bias? We need proof that wellness chiropractors, their families or their maintenance patients have any of the following:

1. longer lives
2. lower lifetime health care costs
3. fewer accidents

4. less disease
5. lower absentee rates
6. fewer injuries
7. less arthritis
8. lower rates of disability
9. shorter hospital stays
10. healthier children

If research proves that regular care has a positive effect on any of the above, the PR boost we receive will be massive. Billions of health care dollars may be saved - but there is no proof yet. Conversely, it would be a wise investment to survey those who do not use DCs. The number-one reason I hear goes like this: "I heard that once you go, they want you to come back forever."

Chiropractic has some tremendously talented, bright clinicians with amazing diagnostic and therapeutic skills. A good DC with a combination of manipulative, soft tissue, modality, exercise, rehabilitation, and nutritional knowledge can get great results rapidly. Results may be defined as pain relief without drugs or surgery, diagnosing the true cause of a problem, and giving the proper advice on issues concerning exercise, rehabilitation, nutrition, specialist referral or diagnostic testing. If our message were "great results - rapidly," our problems would resolve, with one catch: After obtaining great results, we would then have to get the patients out of our offices, which is something most DCs are very capable of doing when they put their training and talents to work.

Do you think Robin McKenzie could sell 2.5 million copies of a book titled *I'll Treat Your Back in My Clinic*? In today's high-pressure, time-limited society, people want easier schedules. *Treat Your Own Back* sells well because it enables people to stay away from health care professionals. The simple solution to improving our standing in society and increasing utilization is to promote chiropractors as the health care providers who get better, faster results with fewer visits and safer treatments.

Of course, we could always continue with the PR we currently receive: "39 more visits? Yeah, sure - I'll be back. He asked me to send my friends, too. Sure - I'll tell my friends."

### References

1. Chiropractic leaders sign Declaration of United Public Relations. *Dynamic Chiropractic*, Dec. 15, 2003. [www.chiroweb.com/archives/21/26/07.html](http://www.chiroweb.com/archives/21/26/07.html).
2. What is the best-selling booklet for patients? *The Back Letter*, November 2003;18(11):127.
3. Mertz CJ. The power of FSV and PNM. *The Chiropractic Journal* 2003; 17(9):19.

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