

The Decision We Didn't Make in 2003 and How It Cost Us

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Welcome to a new year in chiropractic! As you reflect on 2003, you're probably doing many of the things most chiropractors do: closing your books, evaluating how you did and making resolutions for what you'd like to do in the upcoming year.

I'd like you to pause with me for a moment and reflect upon the chiropractic profession's performance. You all know about the progress we have made, such as our big victory with the Medicare Chiropractic Demonstration Project. However, I'd like to take some time to look at how we didn't do. If you look at our profession from a business point of view, we have what I call an "opportunity cost": what it cost us not to make certain decisions.

For example, if you are an investor and you're looking at the 6 percent return on your mutual fund, you might think, "Wow! A 6 percent return is pretty good!" But then you talk to a friend and he says, "Gee, my mutual fund did pretty good this year. I had a 15 percent return!"

Suddenly, you think, "Boy, maybe I didn't do so good after all. I get 6 percent; they get 15 percent. What's the difference?" The difference is that your friend chose a different investment path, selected a different portfolio - and made more money. Maybe he got lucky, or maybe it was skill; regardless, his outcome was different.

This example relates to chiropractic. We can look at 2003 and say to ourselves, "I guess we did OK." But what do we compare "OK" to? There is an opportunity cost of making certain decisions, and the cost is what we could have had versus what we do have.

I propose to you that our lack of unity is the biggest thing holding chiropractic back. We are paying huge costs to run a splintered profession. Keep in mind the following:

Chiropractors only see one in 10 Americans as patients. One in 10 is 10 percent - or only 10 out of 100 Americans. The opportunity cost here? 90 percent of Americans!

A decline of 5,342 students (34 percent) enrolled in chiropractic colleges over the last six years. In 1996, new enrollments at chiropractic colleges were approximately 15,400. In 2002, it was approximately 10,058. Opportunity cost? Unfathomable!

Chiropractic has unlimited potential, but these indicators show us how we're self-limiting because of our behavior. They are direct results of what our opportunity costs represent.

The enormity of our opportunity cost directly affects every single chiropractor, chiropractic college, and chiropractic association in the world. Every single day, it costs us more than we can imagine! It has reduced your patient flow, reduced your income, and as a whole, our public image isn't as positive

as we would like. Every time we send out divided messages or battle each other in public, we take away the potential for getting the most out of anyone's pro-chiropractic effort. And just like compounding interest on a debt, the longer we take to solve the problem, the more costly the problem becomes to our profession.

Those of you who have been around for a while know how difficult it is to get a group of chiropractic leaders to agree on anything. But on Nov. 8, 2003, history was made: We agreed on several things! Approximately 20 leaders from different national chiropractic associations, chiropractic colleges, and chiropractic publications united together in support of a national public relations campaign.

This meeting is a chiropractic milestone; in all of my life, and with the exposure I have had to chiropractic from family members, I have never witnessed an opportunity as significant as this. The fact that so many of our profession's leaders pledged to do something together is monumental! In summary, the leaders signed an agreement to:

- have one unified message: to get the general public to go see a chiropractor;
- not start any public relations efforts on their own;
- retain a qualified, experienced national public relations firm that is experienced in delivering a message to the nation as a whole; and
- trust the firm in developing, managing and carrying out the public relations plan;

Right now, behind-the-scenes work is being done with some of the top public relations firms in the nation - one of which will be selected to bring our message to America. We don't know what this message is, and are not qualified to craft it. That's why we are looking for the "best of the best" to help us. Soon, the selection process will be completed and an announcement will be made.

Can we get by without a nationwide public relations effort? Maybe. Can we evolve, grow, achieve and get the most of our potential by doing it? Absolutely!

Let's change our thinking so we can help more people. After 109 years, we now have an opportunity, and we should not let it cost us. Keep an ear to the ground, stand by - and when you are called upon, come forward. We need your help to make this happen, and together, we will make this work!

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