

An Open Letter to the Chiropractic Profession

Recently, many in the profession have asked me, "Will the Foundation for Chiropractic Progress always portray chiropractic as something more than back pain?" My answer is, "No!" Now, if they asked, "Will the F4CP begin with back pain, neck pain and headaches, and then expand the vision of chiropractic to include more than pain," my answer would be a resounding "Yes!" I do not mean to be coy or to use double-talk, but I do want all to see the global vision and the direction in which we need to be headed to move the market share needle.

If you have been involved in marketing, you also have your finger on the pulse of the public. There can be little doubt in your mind that the public does not have a very good image of the chiropractic profession. They do recognize that chiropractors are involved with backs, necks, headaches, and whiplash, and yet despite this fact, they still visit their medical doctor first. Why do you think the public does this?

If we are going to move the market share needle, we need to do it incrementally. This is the universal law of any successful marketing campaign. People do not regain their health in one visit, nor do they straighten their teeth in one visit - so why would we use an approach with the public that is inconsistent with their current beliefs about the chiropractic profession? The potential of turning the public away from chiropractic because our initial (note, I wrote initial) message is inconsistent with their current beliefs would not change their perception about the profession. In fact, it would confuse them. First of all, we need to gain the public's confidence; then we can roll out the fact that there are many diverse aspects to this profession.

The F4CP needs to gain support from the profession and allow the public to see that we are dealing with what most of the profession professes they do (*NBCE Job Analysis 2005*). While it is certainly true that many provide health and wellness care and much more, an overwhelming majority of DCs in this country are engaged in musculoskeletal-based practices.

After the F4CP begins to deliver a clear and consistent message that supports the public's understanding of what we do, and what DCs actually are doing, we can then begin to change the mindset of the public with a new message: "Orange juice (apple juice, tomato juice, et al.) is not just for breakfast any more!"

The F4CP is not trying to decide or dictate what chiropractic is; the profession has been unable to do that for the past 110 years. What we are trying to do is very simple. Let's put a message out there "initially" that resonates with the public and with the profession (because that is what most do in their office), and then, when the patient seeks the services of a doctor of chiropractic, isn't that where the education should begin?

At this point, as they have in years past, the DC can tell the patient what he or she thinks chiropractic is! Some chiropractors think it is orthopedics, some pediatrics, some sports, some geriatrics, some family practice, some subluxation-focused, some internal disorders, some nutrition and this list is

hardly exhaustive. How can the F4CP possibly address something that the profession has not agreed on in the last 110 years? We are simply suggesting that the initial (again, I write initial) Campaign for Chiropractic must start with what the majority of the public already knows to be true. After all, this is a message for the public, not for the profession!

Chiropractors can believe anything they want, but without patients to support their practices, there are no practices! This is the reason why Kent Greenawalt shared his vision. If we do not begin a public outreach campaign, we will never gain the true market share this profession deserves to have, based upon the excellent care chiropractors offer daily to their patients. The majority of the public just does not know this yet. It is the responsibility of the F4CP to get the message out - one simple, positive message!

During my time of lobbying and political action for this profession, I learned a lesson: "People with full bellies do not fight." By that, I mean that the dissention within the ranks of the chiropractic profession is somewhat of an enigma to me as a non-DC. The profession fights vigorously among its members, but gains no forward momentum in advancing the profession. The profession continues to lose market share, yet there is still fighting among its members. Enrollment in chiropractic colleges has plummeted by 35 percent or more, and the profession's members continue to fight among themselves. The profession's identity continues to blur each and every day because of competitive professions such as physical therapy, massage therapy, osteopathy, and other manual providers - and yet, the profession continues to fight among its members.

As an outsider, the F4CP made some sense to me, enough sense that I am now willing to give up my current position as executive vice president of the Pennsylvania State Chiropractic Association and take on this new challenge. Why? Because I believe it is the next crucial step in the growth of this profession, and I want to offer my help in some small way. I truly believe this message is right, the program is right, the time is right, and the public and profession are in the right frame of mind to accept the new message to "think again."

My convictions are very strong, and I do not even have a dog in this fight ... other than to have gained a passionate appreciation of the value of chiropractic as a health care profession.

It simply makes sense from a business point of view to do what the F4CP is doing; there is not enough money to do what Coca-Cola, McDonald's and other large entities do to promote their products and services each day to the public. We are already limited in funding, which affects our ability to get our message out there. The last thing we need is to fight from within. We have enough of a fight with the eternal forces that bear down on us.

The profession always seems to fly at the stratosphere, yet can never "reach the stars." We can soar to new heights if we turn the energy that we expend at each other upward and outward so that we are one profession working together to accomplish great things for all doctors of chiropractic. Isn't this better than having each association, with more than one group, claiming more than one goal, using up all this energy?

I ask each of you to "think again," and then think about where the profession is now, and where it can be with increased market share. Think about where the individual doctor of chiropractic can be with his or her ability to have a successful practice. I then challenge you to have the wherewithal to continue to support the advancement of the profession from a position of strength. Think about the money needed for ongoing research, education, individual marketing, continued contributions to the

colleges, and to help begin building the self-esteem necessary for any profession to advance.

Can the F4CP do it all? No! However, we can begin somewhere, and that is just what we are planning to do. Won't you help? I need your help and your commitment to advance what you do in the public's mind and to begin to change the public mindset of what this profession has to offer.

Recently, I visited the Connecticut Chiropractic Convention, driving in a torrential downpour that had Interstate 84 East backed up for hours. Despite the conditions, it was well worth the journey for many reasons. One reason, of course, was their commitment to the F4CP, both with support and a two-year financial commitment. The other reason was the opportunity I had to listen to some of their past presidents speak on the reasons why they continue to practice well beyond their retirement years.

Many associations are seeing the benefit of the F4CP, and each time we visit a state association gathering, we have been successful in garnering their support with a financial commitment. If we were not doing the right thing, both the associations and many individual doctors of chiropractic would never be able to see the wisdom that we have to offer them!

For this reason and so many more, I look forward to hearing from you and obtaining your financial commitment to the F4CP.

Gene Veno

President, Foundation for Chiropractic Progress

Author's note: For further information on the Foundation for Chiropractic Progress and its ongoing Campaign for Chiropractic, please send me an e-mail at gveno@foundation4cp.com.

DECEMBER 2005