

## Picking Up Where Med School Left Off

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Nearly a decade ago, a report<sup>1</sup> from the Association of American Medical Colleges found that two-thirds (66.6%) of all 1997 medical school graduates believed their instruction in "alternative medicine" was "inadequate." While some would see this as a problem, I prefer to see it as an opportunity.

According to the most recent AAMC report,<sup>2</sup> this percentage is no longer nearly as high: "Only" 41.5% of 2004 medical school graduates believed they were instructed adequately in "alternative medicine."

I still see this as a great opportunity.

When someone believes they know about something, it is much harder to tell them the true story. You have to prove that what they believe is in error before you can overwrite their beliefs with better information.

With close to half of recently graduated medical physicians knowing they don't know about chiropractic (and other forms of alternative care), they should be more open to hearing what chiropractic can do. However, a number of things will need to be accomplished in order to take advantage of this opportunity.

### Go Talk to the MDs

Chiropractic's history has clearly positioned us as isolationists. In our effort to avoid prosecution, we have limited ourselves to those who understood and agreed with our philosophy. We even created our own lexicon, applying definitions to words that are unique to our profession. With limited communication to the "outside world," chiropractic is continually in danger of being bypassed in favor of those professions that desire to communicate in terms other health care providers can appreciate.

For the longest time, our primary form of communication with other health care providers was through our patients. We would tell a patient something about what chiropractic was doing for them in the (often) vain hope that they could somehow convince their medical doctor we were effective and that the patient should continue with chiropractic care, regardless of their MD's reaction.

Sadly, this is still the way most DCs communicate with other health care providers. This has to change if chiropractors are going to continue working as members of the health care team today's patients are looking for.

### Speak Their Language

Like missionaries to the unenlightened, doctors of chiropractic need to speak in terms their listeners understand. You can't expect a medical doctor to understand chiropractic terms without knowing the definition of those terms. We must first communicate the basic principles of chiropractic in their

terms, and then help them understand the value of what we do. Medical doctors may never fully understand all the nuances of chiropractic philosophy. What matters is that they know enough about chiropractic to feel comfortable working with you.

### Develop Relationships

Working together is all about relationships. Relationships have to be cultivated continuously in order to be valuable. Exchange research reviews, meet for lunch, discuss how you would each approach a particularly difficult case learn each other's strengths.

We've heard it said many times: Other health care professionals are looking to work with a doctor of chiropractic; they just aren't sure whom. Perhaps the DC they could best work with is the one who takes the time to educate them about chiropractic and is willing to have an ongoing relationship.

In every community, we clearly have the opportunity to tell our own story. We can educate medical doctors and other health care professionals about chiropractic. There is nothing preventing us from doing this. Yes, many MDs have already made up their minds against us, but this group is becoming more of a minority with every new class of medical students.

Today's health care providers are more willing to admit they don't have all the answers. They want to learn from doctors who know what they're talking about and can demonstrate why they believe what they believe.

The cost is minimal; all it takes is your time.

### *References*

1. *Medical School Graduation Questionnaire: 1997 Summary Report for All Schools.*
2. *2004 Medical School Graduation Questionnaire: All-Schools Report.*

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