

17,696 Reasons to Use Chiropractic

A NEW HEADLINE FOR A BILLBOARD IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Donald Petersen Jr., BS, HCD(hc), FICC(h)

"Another Anti-Chiropractic Billboard in Connecticut," shouts the headline on the front page of this issue. This billboard is located along U.S. Highway 91 between New Haven and Hartford. The billboard and a similar small advertisement in *The Hartford Courant* were reportedly placed by an anti-chiropractic advocate who had a poor experience with chiropractic and is in the middle of a malpractice lawsuit.

While one can sympathize with someone who has experienced a bad outcome from any type of health care, one has to wonder about this type of reaction.

In comparison, an article in the *New York Times*¹ provides some startling figures on the incidence of malpractice in the United States. According to the authors, in 2004 there were 17,696 medical malpractice lawsuits in which the involved malpractice insurance company was forced to make payouts. Assuming these insurance companies won as many as they lost, that means there were approximately 35,000 malpractice lawsuits filed against the medical profession.

Hmmm what would happen if every one of those patients decided to put up a billboard condemning some form of medical care?

Well, if those billboards were all placed on a highway between Los Angeles and New York, you would see one every 400 feet. If we placed them along Highway 91 between New Haven and Hartford, you couldn't read them because they would be less than 6 feet apart.

Next, we could add billboards protesting the use of health care drugs, sponsored by every patient who experienced a "serious adverse drug reaction" in a year. That would add an estimated 2,216,000 billboards (106,000 of which would represent fatalities).² In that case, you would see a billboard every 13 feet on either side of the cross-country highway, effectively wiping out all scenery.

The data regarding the safety of any health care profession is easy to understand. It is reflected in the malpractice insurance premiums the profession pays. This data is void of passion or prejudice. It merely reflects the cost in dollars for the suffering caused by a particular health care profession.

Medical internists are considered to have some of the lowest medical malpractice rates. Even so, they can pay more than \$30,000 each year in states in which there is no "cap" on the awards juries can give patients. Obstetricians in Florida pay almost \$280,000 per year. Certainly, if chiropractic were as dangerous as the billboard tries to portray, DCs would be paying much more than \$2,000 per year.

So, what are these anti-chiropractic billboards all about?

My belief is that they represent the vain efforts of a very small group of people to garner an inordinate

amount of attention through misrepresentation and distortion of the facts. The news media doesn't acknowledge them, so they have to buy what exposure they can afford along the road and in local newspapers.

But these billboards serve another purpose...

They remind us that without an effective PR campaign, any group of half-baked malcontents can openly criticize chiropractic in a marketplace effectively devoid of our own information. They can easily put us on the defensive and chuckle as we scramble to generate a response. And while we are sometimes quick to counter their efforts with our own billboard or newspaper ad, the obvious question remains: If we can usually find the money to respond when chiropractic is attacked, why can't we seem to find the money to tell our own positive story in the first place?

References

1. Treaster JB, Brinkley J. Behind those medical malpractice rates. *New York Times*, Feb. 22, 2005. <http://peaceandjustice.org/article.php?story=20050222101509845&mode=print0>.
2. Lazarou J, Pomeranz BH, Corey PN. Incidence of adverse drug reactions in hospitalized patients: a meta-analysis of prospective studies. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 1998;279:1200-1205. <http://psnet.ahrq.gov/resource.aspx?resourceID=1519>.

JANUARY 2006