

The Opportunity Is Still Ours ... If We Want It

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About a year ago, I wrote an article asking if it was time for the chiropractic profession to stand up and take a leadership role in forming an "alternative health coalition."¹ (Please note that I personally dislike the terms "alternative health," "alternative medicine," etc. I don't believe chiropractic is "alternative" to any form of care. However, this is the term most widely used, both professionally and publicly, to refer to the list of health care professions that includes chiropractic.) The reaction to that article was very promising, particularly from various leaders within our profession. It seemed many of us had been thinking the same thing, but not talking much about it.

It is now a year later. During the past 12 months, the echo has gotten stronger, particularly in the area of seminars/education. It seems more and more continuing education organizations are seeing other health care professionals enroll in their classes. We also are seeing organizations from outside the chiropractic profession offer their knowledge to doctors of chiropractic.

Some might see this as positive, others will consider it negative. I look at it as inevitable. While the chiropractic adjustment certainly is the exclusive domain of chiropractic, a great deal is shared between professions. Nutrition, herbs and numerous approaches to pain are just a few of the disciplines that can be utilized effectively by many health care professions.

The issues really boil down to leadership. The chiropractic profession has, in many ways, broken ground for other alternative health professions. We wrote the textbook on professional survival, research capacity development without drug money and insurance inclusion (albeit less than optimal). We have set the example that many professional associations are following.

There are a surprising number of leaders in other alternative health professions who also hold doctor of chiropractic degrees. Many of them have taken what they saw in our profession and reworked it for another. When you ask them about their progress, these leaders will tell you the other profession they are a part of is "where chiropractic was 20 years ago."

Chiropractic still has the greatest impact on the health of Americans compared to other "alternative" health care professions. Our 60,000 DCs see approximately 15 million adult patients every year, who make 192 million visits.^{2,3}

But the massage therapists are gaining some serious ground. There are an estimated 150,000 MTs who see approximately 12.5 million patients annually, who make 114 million visits.^{2,3}

Acupuncturists are well behind, with 17,000 providers serving 3 million patients each year, who make 5 million visits. While still relatively small, the acupuncture profession is rapidly growing by more than 2,000 providers a year. They probably will reach 30,000 acupuncturists in the next five years.^{2,3}

At the risk of being redundant, let me ask the same question I asked a year ago: Should the creation of an "alternative health coalition" become a priority, given all we currently are faced with? If you add all of the alternative health professions up, we could be involved in creating a coalition

of 230,000 providers serving more than 30 million U.S. patients. This would compare much more favorably to the approximately 700,000 MDs and DOs in the U.S.

The opportunity appears to still exist. We do have the resources. Do we have the vision?

References

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