

Patience Is the Key to Success

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In a previous article, I told you the story of how I became a volunteer for the Neighborhood Christian Clinic, located in south Phoenix. I also shared some of the things I learned while integrating into that health care team, some of which bears repeating.

It was five years ago that I heard a medical doctor at our church do a presentation for the clinic. If you remember, I went up to him after the presentation and asked him who was in charge of the chiropractic service at the clinic. He told me that they didn't have chiropractic included in the clinic and that if I was interested in starting a chiropractic service, he would arrange a meeting with the medical director.

I met with the medical director, and he told me he would like to have me as a volunteer, but the only space available for a chiropractic service was in the kitchen. I told him I would be happy to set up a portable table and could take care of patients in a very small space. That satisfied him and I began taking care of patients in the kitchen.

Over the next five years, I had many interesting experiences. First, I made it clear that I was not there to provide primary care. Rather, I was part of a team of 40 medical doctors and dentists, all experts doing what they do best. For me, the focus was taking care of spinal problems. Once the team understood that I was there to complement their efforts, I quickly earned their respect and their referrals.

After six months, we had a meeting one day to discuss musculoskeletal patients being seen by primary care doctors. It was suggested that they should actually be sent directly to the chiropractor first, as it was wasting the primary care doctor's time if they were eventually being referred to the chiropractor anyway. The team voted, and I began seeing those patients before any other provider. This was a big step forward in integrating chiropractic in the overall services provided.

After one year, the board decided I should recruit more chiropractors, and I was appointed director of conservative care. I began recruiting, and we now have five volunteer DCs in our department.

In the third year, I was invited to serve on the board of directors of the nonprofit organization that made policy decisions for the clinic. This is where my patience truly was tested. Although we had achieved great results for clinic patients using chiropractic and I had experience in the nonprofit sector, having founded a nonprofit myself, the MDs seemed to ignore the chiropractic division, and I couldn't figure out why. In publicity and fund-raising materials, chiropractic was overlooked, but I remained diplomatic and kept my cool, despite the oversights. Over time, the division became noticed and included on a regular basis because I hadn't become defensive or aggressive. Like everything else, it simply took time for the group to understand the value of our service.

Being patient has really paid off - for me, for chiropractic and for the clinic. In the beginning, there

was only a paid medical director; then we added a paid dentist. Recently, I broached the subject of a paid chiropractor at our board meeting, and much to my surprise, the board was very receptive to considering it. One of the main reasons they were open to the idea is the fact that I've been collecting statistics for the past two years to demonstrate the value chiropractic brings to the clinic. We have seen 38 percent growth over two years, and the financial data indicate that our division is the only one in the entire clinic that is self-supporting. Thus, I am confident we will bring forth a paid chiropractor in the next year.

Over the years, I've seen many chiropractors, myself included, lack the patience it takes to truly become a respected member of the medical community. We know the value we bring and we want things to happen quickly; it's our nature. But we have to build credibility through education, performance and quality. Though it has taken years of volunteering my time with the Neighborhood Christian Clinic to bring chiropractic to the forefront, it is now considered critical to the overall service, and I've been given far more influence over clinic decisions as well. By the giving of my time and having patience, I've reaped great rewards, as has the clinic and our community as a whole.

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