

## New Jersey: A Model of Chiropractic Unity

ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY CHIROPRACTORS CELEBRATES ITS FIVE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY.

Editorial Staff

Five years ago, New Jersey chiropractors didn't exactly know where to turn - or perhaps they had too many places to turn - when it came to joining a chiropractic state association; no less than seven such associations were competing for their membership within the state. According to many involved in that chaotic environment, the chiropractic profession in New Jersey was routinely embarrassed in front of state politicians, in legal arenas and with the public.

Five years ago, something had to change, and change it did, in the form of unity. [Six of the seven state associations ultimately agreed to function as a single entity](#): the Association of New Jersey Chiropractors (ANJC). The Central New Jersey Chiropractic Society, New Jersey Chiropractic Society, Ocean Mammoth Chiropractic Society and Southern New Jersey Society agreed to merge, while the Council of New Jersey Chiropractors and Northern New Jersey Chiropractic Society agreed to function as part of the ANJC while remaining independent. (The Garden State Chiropractic Society was the only organization not to unify.) The objective of the new association was for each of the six organizations and its members, whether merged or independent, to receive equal representation.

According to ANJC President Steven Clarke, DC, who, along with Executive Director Dr. Sig Miller, was interviewed recently by *DC*, unity was a process of momentum-building that began as early as 2001. "Prior to the unity effort, there were seven groups occasionally doing things together, but not all working together at the same time," said Dr. Clarke. "Most agreed with the concept of, 'United we stand, divided we fall.' The different organizations developed primarily because of location. ... Most had their own financial situation with PAC dollars and dues."



"The unity concept was first brought up many years ago by Dr. Frank Zaccaria," he continued. "Around 2001, the New Jersey Chiropractic Society, led by Dr. Michael Spadafino, started seriously working to the goal of unity, with the Southern, Central and Monmouth Ocean societies immediately wanting the same goal. Once the momentum started, the other organizations began to see unity as a reality."

Are there keys to achieving state unity? Yes, says Dr. Clarke - among them a willingness for all parties to "take a deep breath, step back from their old way of thinking their idea [is] the only and best idea, and look at what is best for the entire profession at large." He also believes unity has several distinct advantages, not the least of which is the ability to deliver a single, consistent message to state legislators:

"Legislators now have one voice for the profession to turn to. When a legislative issue comes up, legislators know they are to call our lobbyist. Some of the top individuals with insurance carriers have had numerous meetings with our top insurance consultants. They see the same faces, get one unified message from our organization and have developed much better communication between the profession and the carriers. For example, within the past 2-3 months, we had an issue with an insurance carrier not paying for extraspinal treatments. As a unified voice, we had our leadership and consultants get right into action and were able to influence the carrier to reverse its position."

Since the New Jersey unification in early 2004, [several other states have unified](#), including Michigan, Colorado and Oregon, while [Virginia](#) and several others appear destined to do so in the not-so-distant future. This trend is likely to continue, says Dr. Clarke, and ANJC is playing a role in facilitating the process.

"For many years, carriers and legislators have said to us, 'When you get your act together, come back to us.' The profession went in so many directions they did not know who or where to turn to. As the unified states start demonstrating more and more successes, other states will follow the lead."

Added Dr. Miller: "Given our success, I am interacting with many other state associations, assisting them with a number of projects designed to help them grow members and to increase nondues revenues." The ANJC has nearly 1,500 members, which represents 55 percent of the state's doctors of chiropractic; Dr. Miller anticipates membership growth to approximately 1,700 DCs (more than 60 percent) by the end of 2009. "I believe we have the highest percentages in the country," he said. "[And] our recent annual survey indicates that about 84 percent believes we are meeting/exceeding expectations."

Many wonder if national chiropractic unity will be more readily achieved if all 50 states are unified. As readers will recall, recent [merger efforts between the ACA and ICA proved valuable, but ultimately unsuccessful](#). Dr. Miller feels that while one may not lead to the other, state and national organizations can work together for the greater good of the profession.

"I hope that soon down the road, all state members will automatically be members of nationals; that way [the national associations] can focus on national issues and assist states on an as-needed basis. [It] seems a waste to time, money and resources that [the national associations] have to focus on other items like attracting new members, etc. They are the experts on national issues; we deal with statewide/local issues."

Gene Venio, executive vice president of the [Pennsylvania Chiropractic Association](#) and a veteran of state chiropractic unity efforts, helped make unity a reality in New Jersey, according to Dr. Miller, and recently assisted with ANJC's strategic planning meeting. When asked to comment on ANJC's five-year anniversary, Venio emphasized how unification can impact doctors of chiropractic and the profession:

"What a difference a unified organization can make for its members/people, regardless of the industry they serve. I have witnessed firsthand the 180-degree turnaround in New Jersey since they melded separate chiropractic associations/societies into the now highly functioning ANJC. I recently had an opportunity to visit with the ANJC in January 2009 and I saw an association that was focused on the many important member issues. The ANJC is now 'member driven' and for all of the right reasons. Gone are the interpersonal squabbles and back biting that was one time destroying the profession from within. The future is very bright in New Jersey and every state and national organization should study the New Jersey model because what has transpired in N.J. is truly a remarkable story."

*To learn more about the ANJC, including organizational structure and ongoing legislative efforts, visit [www.anjc.info](http://www.anjc.info).*

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