

Dr. Ian Coulter: A Chiropractic Luminary

Louis Sportelli, DC

"Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

We all know people who are passionate about what they do. These individuals oftentimes are unaware of how many people they have inspired and motivated throughout their lives. I was particularly moved by the number of individuals one person in particular has impacted during his career. On March 19, 2011, I had the honor of presenting a Distinguished Lifetime Service Award to [Ian Coulter, PhD](#), whose career spans more than 40 years.

Honoring Ian Coulter was particularly gratifying because, as a non-DC, he has been able to view the chiropractic profession from a unique perspective as a researcher, a sociologist, an economist and a friend. In introducing the award, I was provided with the opportunity to truly demonstrate the large footprint Dr. Coulter has left on the entire chiropractic community:

"This reminds me of the story of a priest who wished to 'heal' people. But, being a priest, he did not want to be given the glory for his work, as that might well distract him from his 'purpose' in life. He thought of a solution, so he prayed that whenever his shadow touched someone in need, that person would be healed. As you might expect, his prayer was granted. He journeyed his entire life healing people, but unaware of the thousands of people he touched.

"This is much like Ian Coulter. He has made a remarkable impact on the chiropractic profession, but may never know the thousands of people he has touched directly as chiropractors and indirectly, the patients they serve."

A Lifetime of Service

Dr. Coulter was born in [New Zealand](#) and holds degrees in sociology from the University of Canterbury (BA, MA Honors) and the London School of Economics & Political Science (PhD). After immigrating to Canada in 1969, he served as an associate professor of sociology at Laurentian University until 1976. From 1976 to 1979, he held the position of associate professor, research series, in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto.

Department of Behavioral Science in the Faculty of Medicine. In 1981, he was appointed executive vice president of the [Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College](#), interim president in 1982 and president from 1982 to 1991.

In 1991, Dr. Coulter was a Pew Fellow at the RAND/University of California at Los Angeles, Center for Health Policy Study, from which he received a certificate in health policy analysis. Additional qualifications include a diploma in educational management from the Institute of Educational Management, Harvard University.

From 1992 to 1995, Dr. Coulter was the director of the UCLA / Drew University Minority Oral Health Research Center. In July 1996, he was appointed as a full professor in the UCLA School of Dentistry, Division of Public Health and Community Dentistry (previously Section of Public Health Dentistry), a position he currently holds. He also currently holds the positions of health consultant, RAND; and research professor at the [Southern California University of Health Sciences](#).

During 2003 and 2004, Dr. Coulter was the director of the Education Abroad program for the University of California in Australia. From January until June 2005, he was on sabbatical as a visiting professor at the New Zealand Health Technology Assessment Center in the Christchurch School of Medicine, University of Otago.

From 2006 to 2008, Dr. Coulter also held the position of vice president, integrative medicine and clinical research, at the Samueli Institute. In 2007, the [RAND Corporation and the Samueli Institute](#) created an endowment to support independent policy research on complementary, alternative and integrative medicine. Dr. Coulter was appointed as the RAND / Samueli chair for integrative medicine at RAND.

Uncanny Insight Into the Chiropractic Profession

As his career reveals, Ian Coulter is a scholar and prolific author who has produced almost 200 publications, books, reports, abstracts and poster presentations. *Prolific* seems to be the only word to describe his seemingly inexhaustible publication list. While these works have been scholarly, they have also provided a very practical and pragmatic application to the doctor in the field. His publications have ranged from clinical relevance to a discussion of the philosophical views of the profession. These works have been truly foundational in enabling other professions to achieve a better understanding of what chiropractic and chiropractors can do. More importantly, however, his work has given the profession a tremendous gift – to help us better understand ourselves.

The depth of his understanding can be illustrated clearly in a paper published 25 years ago, "Chiropractic Physicians for the 21st Century," in the *Journal of the Canadian Chiropractic Association*. With today's discussion of integrated care, primary care and patient-centered care, all buzzwords in 2011 publications, Dr. Coulter examined (in 1986) chiropractic education and related the status of chiropractic. The article is as relevant today as it was then (perhaps more so), and the conclusions he arrived at resonate with significance:

"For most of our history, chiropractic education struggled simply to be as good as the other health sciences. For perhaps the first time in our history, we have the possibility to be the very best. Not the very best perhaps at everything, but the very best at those things we have chosen as important and significant, and by which we wish to be judged. What kind of chiropractic physician for the 21st century? Caring, compassionate, dedicated to patients ... committed to work, learning, rationality, science and to serving society. Ethically sensitive with moral integrity ... with equanimity, humility, and self knowledge. Those qualities that should characterize all those who wish to lay claim to the title, healer."

The articles Dr. Coulter has written provide keen insight, offer challenge, encourage debate and give pause for analysis before jumping to decisions. Some of his earlier publications that exemplify the depth and breadth of his insight and his involvement include "The Role of the Chiropractor In The Changing Health Care System -From Marginal to Mainstream" (1996); "Alternative Care Models and a Changing Health Care System" (1996); "Consensus: Too Much of a Good Thing" (1991); "Sociology and

Philosophy of Chiropractic" (1991); and "The Patient, The Practitioner and Wellness – Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Gained" (1986).

A Much-Deserved Honor

In 2011, Dr. Coulter continues his role as the [RAND / Samueli chair for integrative medicine](#). RAND and the Samueli Institute have created an endowment to support independent policy research on complementary, alternative and integrative medicine. The Samueli Institute Fund for Policy Studies in Integrative Medicine at RAND was established and supports studies that will define complementary and alternative medicine practices, and identify what kinds of health problems they can effectively treat. The institute's long-term goals are to conduct research that will change perception about the fundamental nature of healing and to transform health care.

How much more aligned can Ian Coulter's life story be with the chiropractic philosophy of health and the understanding what needs to be done to achieve that vision? Truly, he is an inspiration to many, a visionary and dedicated researcher who does not forget that the patient is the center of the health care model. His unrelenting quest to provide insight and direction for the chiropractic profession has spanned his entire career.

Chiropractic has indeed been fortunate to have the talent and involvement of Dr. Ian Coulter for many decades. He has provided us with intellectual challenges to make us think and sound basis for the approaches we need to take for chiropractic to achieve its rightful place in the health care delivery system. The relative uniqueness of Ian Coulter's approach is that he works with us, not against us. He tells us what we *need* to hear, not just what we want to hear. He has embraced us as brothers and sisters as well as colleagues, and he has been, most of all, a friend to chiropractic. [The NCMIC Foundation](#) is pleased to have provided Dr. Ian Coulter with a Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his substantial works and contributions to our profession.

"The value of a man should be seen in what he gives, and not in what he is able to receive." – Albert Einstein

MAY 2011