

Are We in Danger of Losing the ICA?

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Sometimes, controversial subjects need to be discussed. This is one of those articles. While you may not agree with everything you are about to read, I ask only that you consider my thoughts. Whether you agree or disagree, I would love to hear from you.

While overshadowed by the events at Life University, the International Chiropractors Association (ICA) has faced some definite challenges over the last year. It is no secret that for the last two decades, the ICA has been led almost exclusively by Sid Williams' loyalists. A casual review of previous ICA presidents reveals a long list of Life University graduates, Life employees and Dynamic Essentials (DE) devotees.

I have been told more than once that Dr. Williams has personally called doctors asking them to run for various ICA leadership positions. Needless to say, those who have accepted the offer have enjoyed his full political support.

Dr. Williams has held a number of ICA leadership positions himself. He was a constant figure on the ICA board, until Life University recently removed him as their representative.

None of this is meant to be a criticism of Dr. Williams, or the many other people he has helped elect to various positions of ICA leadership. No one would argue that the ICA has benefited immeasurably from Dr. Williams' leadership and support.

However, during the same time that Dr. Williams has sustained losses with his institution, the ICA has suffered its own. These include:

1. Loss of the lucrative King Koil contract - ICA's endorsement of this mattress-maker brought a reported \$400,000 into its coffers every year.
2. Falling membership (now less than 1,800) - Once boasting almost 3,000 members, ICA membership has fallen below 1,800 (at the time of this writing), and is reportedly losing members at a rate of over 50 per month. At this rate, the ICA could run out of members by the end of 2005. This trend is particularly notable in the last year or so.
3. Less visibility - With a current budget smaller than the practice income of some of its members, the ICA is no longer able to support many of the efforts it did in the past. ICA's lack of presence is particularly noticeable in this time when so many challenges are facing our profession.

While the responsibility for these woes can't all be placed on the shoulders of the current leadership, the correlation can't help but stand out.

The current ICA president is Dr. D.D. Humber, a fine Southern gentleman who, until recently, assisted Dr. Williams in the daily administration of Life University as a university vice president. Both men have endured some extremely hard times.

Under their leadership, Life has gotten into some pretty tough situations:

- a discrimination lawsuit by four former Life faculty;
- multiple lawsuits filed by over 200 former Life students, one of which could become a class-action lawsuit;
- numerous wrongful-discharge lawsuits;
- a severe loss of students;
- "technical default" of Life's municipal bonds; and
- loss of chiropractic accreditation

Please don't get me wrong: Dr. Williams and Dr. Humber have done many great things for this profession. But, like all of us, they have made some mistakes.

One can't help but see a correlation between the severe loss of members and income sources under the ICA's Williams/Humber leadership, and the severe loss of students and accreditation under Life's Williams/Humber leadership.

Both organizations are in danger: Life University of failing to survive, and the ICA of becoming irrelevant.

With less than three percent of U.S. chiropractors paying membership dues, ICA's budget will scarcely top the practice income of some of its members, as mentioned earlier. It will lack both the money and the support within the profession to be taken seriously.

One indication of this potential irrelevancy is the number and content of the ICA press releases in the last six months of 2002. With so much going on, the few ICA press releases being sent out tend to be non-news-oriented, or reprints of press releases already sent out by other organizations. This was not the case two years ago.

The hope for Life is to regain accreditation as quickly as possible. President Ben DeSpain has taken that bull by the horns and is showing leadership in several areas that may help Life survive. While he's not a doctor of chiropractic, he has the fire and determination needed to get the job done.

Likewise, the hope for the ICA lies in its leadership. Another two years of Williams/Humber could continue the downward spiral. As has happened at Life, a fresh team of leaders needs to tackle ICA's current challenges with that same fire and dedication.

Who should lead the ICA today? I don't even know who the candidates will be, and I can't vote.

What I can say is that when an organization such as the ICA, which has been the conscience of chiropractic for so many years, gets into this kind of situation, it's time to make changes.

This is a time for all current ICA members, former members and supporters to begin to see what the ICA can become at this, the beginning of our second century. It is a time to look ahead to today's challenges, while never forgetting the foundation the ICA was established on.

This is why I am urging all current ICA members to think carefully about their decisions when ballots are mailed out in the next two months. Don't vote the "party line"; vote for the future of the ICA.

For those DCs who used to belong to the ICA, or have supported it in the past, spend a few dollars and

become members during the election. (You will want to become a member during the month of March to be able to vote in this year's election.) If you care at all, make a commitment for three months of membership and see if you can make a difference in the ICA's future. If you can make that difference, you may decide to retain your membership and get more involved.

This is a pivotal time for the ICA, and for chiropractic. To remain viable, the ICA must have greater membership and greater involvement.

DMP Jr.

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