

ICA Meets Attacks on Profession Head On

The media's recent stories "warning" consumers about chiropractic care and alleging that chiropractic care will put them in grave danger is being met head on by the ICA. The most recent of these attacks was by Peter Gott, MD. Supposedly responding to a question from a consumer asking Dr. Gott to, "Please explain how chiropractic care can lead to permanent nerve injury," the columnist proceeded to offer up the now predictable, but completely unsubstantiated line about how he knew some patients that had been put at risk by chiropractors, and that his quick referral to a neurosurgeon and the subsequent operations saved them from permanent damage.

Within a matter of hours, ICA's response was being handed to editors of those papers across the nation which had carried the offensive article. This response is part of ICA's campaign to answer such unsubstantiated and fear-based assertions head-on in a rebuttal column titled "A Grain of Salt is Prescribed."

"ICA will respond to each and every fear-based and misleading article with facts and not hesitate to highlight the anti-competitive and grossly misleading direction these attacks take," said ICA President Dr. John K. Maltby. "The safety and clinical effectiveness record is so overwhelmingly on the side of chiropractic that I cannot understand why critics and competitors continue to hit on the one area where any objective comparison with medicine makes chiropractic the big winner," he said.

In this particular column Dr. Gott wrote: "I am not making this up. I can think of several patients in my practice who underwent chiropractic manipulation for several weeks. These unfortunate people experienced worsening symptoms and came to me in desperation because, with chiropractic care, their lower-back pains had progressively spread to the buttocks and legs;

they could not walk or stand without excruciating pain."

Perhaps anticipating the reaction from the chiropractic profession, Dr. Gott concluded his article by asserting that, "Incidentally, my view is considered appropriate and reasonable by most reputable chiropractors, including

a past president of the American Chiropractic Association who is both my friend and my consultant for chiropractic matters."

ICA, in its response to the editors explained that "Doctors of chiropractic do not prescribe or administer drugs of any kind as a matter of choice as chiropractic is a natural healing science. However, in the case of the article, *Be cautious when seeking chiropractic care* by Peter Gott, M.D., recently published in your paper, I feel an urgent need to urge every consumer who read that

misleading and self-serving piece to immediately take a large grain of salt, to avoid being duped by his sensational marketing line."

"The chiropractic profession," ICA wrote, "encourages the honest public discussion of safety issues related to health care, and we invite any interested or concerned consumer to visit www.chiropracticissafe.org on the Internet for additional information on the safety and effectiveness of chiropractic science and practice." (See facsimile of letter below.)



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A Giant Grain of Salt is Prescribed

Dear Editor:

Doctors of chiropractic do not prescribe or administer drugs of any kind as a matter of choice, as chiropractic is a natural healing science. However, in the case of the article, "Be cautious when seeking chiropractic care" by Peter Gott, M.D., recently published in your paper, I feel an urgent need to urge every consumer who read that misleading and self-serving piece to immediately take a large grain of salt, to avoid being duped by his sensational marketing line. The chiropractic profession encourages the honest public discussion of safety issues related to health care, and I invite any interested or concerned consumer to visit www.chiropracticissafe.org on the Internet for additional information on the safety and effectiveness of chiropractic science and practice.

The research and actuarial records show that chiropractic is the safest and most cost-effective of all of the doctor-level health care professions by a massive margin,¹ and the public is turning to the doctor of chiropractic for care in record numbers. In a landmark study first published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr. David M. Eisenberg reported, that "... in 1990 Americans made an estimated 425 million visits to providers of unconventional therapy. This number exceeds the number of visits to all U.S. primary care physicians (388 million). Expenditures associated with use of unconventional therapy in 1990 amounted to approximately \$13.7 billion, three quarters of which (\$10.3 billion) was paid out of pocket. This figure is comparable to the \$12.8 billion spent out of pocket annually for all hospitalizations in the United States."² Massive economic and marketplace shifts are taking place, away from standard medical practices, in the direction of such non-medical providers as doctors of chiropractic.

Is this why Dr. Gott decided to "warn" consumers? This is a very legitimate question because the research record sure does not bear out his claims. Without presenting any reliable data, and offering only his own unsubstantiated anecdotes, Dr. Gott tells consumers to "be cautious when seeking chiropractic care." Using the worst kind of fear tactics, Dr. Gott talks about worsening symptoms and how some people "... could have suffered permanent and severe handicaps." Unsubstantiated fear-based admonitions, such as Dr. Gott has presented, raise a host of questions about his motives and intentions, including economic, competition, practical and ethical issues.

On the other hand, the pages of both the public media and scientific journals are filled with masses of hard data on medical errors and the cost of medical mistakes. Consider, for example, The Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, released in November of 1999, which estimated that 44,000-94,000 Americans die each year as a result of medical errors, and the annual cost attributable to medical errors is \$29 billion in additional health care burdens.³ Indeed, concern about medical errors is so pervasive that Congress has held repeated hearings and the federal government has established a bureau to address its challenges. For more information, visit the government website at <http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/errorsix.htm>. Is the best defense, in Dr. Gott's mind, a good offense?

In a situation in which, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (National Center for Health Statistics), "More people die in a given year as a result of medical errors than from motor vehicle accidents (43,458), breast cancer (42,297), or AIDS (16,516),"⁴ "warning" consumers about the risks of chiropractic, which are hardly a factor by anybody's hard data, rings pretty hollow and ought to be a red flag alerting consumers to Dr. Gott's motives and his objectivity.

I also feel obliged to respond to Dr. Gott's assertion that "responsible" members of the chiropractic profession share his perspective. This is a regrettable mis-statement, and one which all professional organizations in the chiropractic profession, including I believe the American Chiropractic Association which Dr. Gott specifically cites, will emphatically dispute. I will leave it to the official representatives of the American Chiropractic Association to present their position on these issues, which I am quite certain they will.

In the final analysis, the chiropractic profession respects the intelligence and rights of all consumers to know the facts about all health care procedures, including risks and side-effects. The chiropractic community does insist, however, that this discussion take place on the basis of facts, not fear.

Thank you for your attention and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions or provide any additional information any of your readers may have as a result of this important exchange.

Sincerely yours,

John K. Maltby, DC, FICA
President, International Chiropractors Association

1. *The Effectiveness and Cost Effectiveness of Chiropractic Management of Low-Back Pain* (The Manga Report). Pran Manga and Associates (1993) — University of Ottawa, Canada.

Acute Low Back Problems in Adults. Clinical Practice Guidelines. Bigos S, et al. Agency for Health Care Policy and Research Publication No. 950642 (1994) — U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

New Zealand Report. Hasselberg PD. Government Printer, Wellington — 1979.

2. David M. Eisenberg, Ronald C. Kessler, Cindy Foster, Frances E. Norlock, David R. Calkins, and Thomas L. Delbanco, "Unconventional Medicine in the United States — Prevalence, Costs, and Patterns of Use" *The New England Journal of Medicine*, January 28, 1993, Volume 328:246-252, Number 4

3. *To Err Is Human: Building a Safer Health System* (2000) Institute of Medicine, <http://books.nap.edu/books/0309068371/html/index.html>

4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (National Center for Health Statistics). Births and Deaths: Preliminary Data for 1998. *National Vital Statistics Reports*. 47(25):6, 1999.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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you give back to a profession that has not only been very good to us as practitioners, but has been the source of much healing and hope for tens of millions of patients around the world. ICA is on the move. We are dedicated to advancing chiropractic at every opportunity. Join me and others in advancing chiropractic's role in the health care of our children. You not only can be a chiropractic hero, you should!

JOIN ICA TODAY!

SEE PAGE 4 FOR APPLICATION