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## Taking On the Fight to Get An Honest Record in the National Media

By Stuart E. Hoffman, DC, FICA

In recent weeks, major media organizations including *TIME* magazine (June 7, 2005) and *Consumer Reports* (August, 2005) have included references to the "risk" of stroke from chiropractic cervical adjustments. The recent appearances of these safety assertions are part of a long litany of claims of risk in the popular media, but the glaring fact of the matter is that there is never any meaningful substantiation provided. These references are clearly designed to impact consumer behavior through fear. What a disservice to the public, and an insult to objective journalism. The overwhelming majority of chiropractic patients ignore such scare tactics, as they should, but who really knows how many others, who have no experience with chiropractic, decide not to seek chiropractic care because of the publicity given to such risk claims?

Any claim to quality and objective journalism by such media organizations becomes suspect when fear factors are employed, but not substantiated. Why do they not offer the evidence to back up their claims? The answer is simple and alarming: It doesn't exist. Who are the experts on chiropractic risk and injury? The malpractice companies that

cover chiropractors, of course. That includes ChiroSecure and myself, because our familiarity with the actuarial record. We ought to be the first source sought out by any journalist or investigative reporter. My phone has yet to ring, and I have little doubt that the administrators of all the other chiropractic malpractice insurance carriers would have a similar story to tell.

The matter of consumer safety is just not a legitimate point on which chiropractic's critics and competitors should be spending their communications efforts, especially in light of the stark, frightening and scandalous scale of the risks associated with allopathic medicine and drugs. Still, with more than a trillion dollars changing hands in the health care marketplace in the US alone each year, we can expect competition to become more and more savage and fear-based and less and less anchored in responsible dialogue and credible information.

The absurd depths to which this anti-chiropractic effort can sink were vividly illustrated by the recent incident of the billboard in Connecticut that read, "WARNING: Chiropractic Adjustments Can Kill or Permanently Disable You". Thanks to the swift and effective intervention of the Connecticut Chiropractic Council, ICA's affiliate organization in that state, ICA's national leaders and others, this offensive sign was covered up. But the fact that it appeared at all is a sign of things to come.

"These scare tactics, based on a grotesquely deceitful and intentionally harmful message, are about as low as chiropractic critics and competitors can go", said ICA Board Member Dr. George Curry from Windsor, Connecticut. "ICA will respond immediately with whatever means it requires to prevent this kind of lie-based campaign from hurting chiropractors or patients," he said.

If the perpetuation of groundless fear-based concerns in the media and at the hands of paid public relations operations is likely to be the ongoing reality, how should chiropractic respond? First and foremost, no appearance of any claim about chiropractic risk in the media should go without a strong and authoritative response from the chiropractic profession. ICA's Media Ready Response Team has done an extraordinary job of responding to such misleading copy, and as an example of their effectiveness, I would urge all readers to see ICA's response to the recent *TIME* story which can be viewed on the ICA website at [www.chiropractic.org](http://www.chiropractic.org).

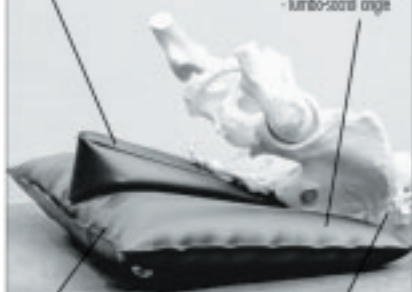
But we also need to be positive and proactive. My strong belief is that the chiropractic profession should make its safety record a centerpiece of all consumer communications. Fighting fire with fire, in this case is both the right



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