



PERSPECTIVE

The Professional Qualities of the Chiropractor

By Gerard W. Clum, D.C.

(This was the keynote address presented by Dr. Clum at the 2006 Annual Convocation of the European Chiropractors Union held May 25-26 in Stockholm, Sweden. Printed with permission.)

Thank you very much for the opportunity to offer this address at your 2006 convocation. I am honored by the invitation. I must admit that I struggled with the topic of this presentation. This is due to its complexity and its simplicity as well as to the hubris to think I could articulate something detailed and meaningful from another continent and another culture that would be relevant to you. My goal will be to offer a few themes rather than behaviors and their context, themes that hopefully will be broad enough and consistent enough to overcome our respective cultural biases.

If asked to do so we could each provide a list of qualities that we would like to see demonstrated in the persons and lives of our chiropractic colleagues. Further I am confident that our lists would share many points in common. So, what is the issue, why invite a presentation of this nature? Maybe, if we are fortunate, we might conclude this session with something that would be useful for later reflection or if unlucky a good model of a bad example of a keynote address!

A precursor to the consideration of the professional qualities of chiropractors or physicians or barristers is an understanding of the essential elements of a profession of any kind. The thoughts on what constitutes a "profession" at first glance would seem to be a simple matter but after a bit of research and reflection it becomes clear that agreement on what it means to a profession is rather lacking.

At one end of the spectrum we have the crusty and somewhat cynical view of Mr. George Bernard Shaw who likened being a member of a profession, a professional-of-any kind as to be a "conspirator against the laity." We also have the gritty cultural reality that reflects on prostitution as the "oldest profession." From these perspectives why would we want to demonstrate professional qualities? At the other end of the continuum is a more considered view of the constructive intentions of the participants. Said various ways, in today's thinking, the basic functional unit of a profession can be rendered to a simple set of criteria. First, a unique body of knowledge and second a self-imposed obligation to serve the community.¹ From these perspectives why wouldn't we want to demonstrate professional qualities?

In a sociological context professions have been considered from the perspective of applied knowledge. Freidson expressed being a profession as possessing an occupation that performs work with special characteristics

while competing for economic, social and political rewards.² Greenwood and Wilensky grouped the characteristics of professions as including knowledge/skills, license/mandate, autonomy, collegiality and service.^{3,4}

A broader context and flavor of the discussion of professions embraces the concept of values in professional life. Professions as guardians of social values or as a way of life with a moral value are expressions of this basic definitional set.⁵ Recently retired groundbreaking U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day

O'Connor quoted a noted academic legal scholar as defending a profession as "a group...pursuing a learned art as a common calling in the spirit of public service..."⁶

While the members of the profession point to a body of knowledge and an expectation of service to the public some outside of the profession question the altruism of such proclamations. Consider if you will a perspective offered in the Hippocratic Oath:

"I will impart a knowledge of the Art to my own sons, and those of my teachers, and to disciples bound by a stipulation and oath according to the law of medicine, but to none others..."⁷

The emphasis added is mine and it is also the point. The professions as evidenced by the behavior of their members are sometimes more interested in the protection of their guild as opposed to serving the public good.

If the definition and concept of professions is in question then the idea of "professionalism" must be similarly

confusing. We often speak of the presence or absence of professionalism as evidenced by specific behavior of persons within a professional community. But as we make these references do we really have any agreed upon basis to draw these conclusions and to render these judgments? I suggest we do not. In this context it appears that the definition of professionalism and the definition of pornography have something in common. In 1964 U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart when pressed for a definition of pornography indicated he didn't have one when he related, "I shall attempt to further define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced...but I know it when I see it."⁸ Is "professionalism" one of those mercurial concepts that we can express characteristics of, examples of and the effects of, but in the final analysis — beyond a few fundamental threshold concepts — we define it by what we observe in others as being appropriate, right and moral and by no other standard? While we may not have

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