



VIEWPOINT

Fifty Year Journey in Chiropractic

By William B. Gallagher, DC, DPhCS

Fifty years ago chiropractors were caring for 10% of the population in the USA. They were doing this with approximately 16,000 doctors. Now 50 years later 70,000 chiropractors are still caring for 20% of the population.

The question that comes to mind is why has the percentage remained about the same even though our numbers have increased significantly?

Let's go back to the early 50's and see. In 1954, people were going to chiropractors for all types of conditions such as heart trouble, digestive disorders, allergies, arthritis, organic conditions and of course muscular skeletal problems. Chiropractors were truly considered an alternative to medical care. In fact, the first two patients treated by Dr. D.D. Palmer were for deafness and heart trouble.

It wasn't till chiropractic came under insurance that we became known as back doctors. This was due to the fact that insurance policies didn't have any codes for chiropractic. So we took the easiest way out, we used medical codes, which happened to be muscular skeletal symptom codes.

By using such codes we were quick-

ly paid, but we lost our true identity and soon became listed as back specialists. But we got paid and soon chiropractors stopped educating their patients about the philosophy of chiropractic.

Then came the practice management groups. Several of them introduced charging and using several therapies. As a result the chiropractor was able to charge more per visit and increase the fee of the office visit.

Chiropractic entered into what was called the golden era and many began to earn large sums of money on few patients. The patients came because the cost to them was covered by their insurance and many chiropractors used NOPE — no out of pocket expenses.

Then chiropractors began advertising themselves as back pain doctors. This instilled deeper into the minds of the patients the fact that chiropractors were indeed just back doctors. Soon you began to hear the patients say, "I'll be back Doc, when my back hurts." The chiropractors continued emphasizing being back doctors, and in the public's mind we became known as musculoskeletal doctors. We lost our image as true alternatives to medical care for health conditions other than just back pain.

Then to make matters even worse,



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the insurance companies began to raise their deductibles and limit the number of visits allowed to chiropractors. Some even discontinued covering chiropractic care. Now to add to the public awareness of what chiropractors can really do, the CCE and the National Chiropractic Boards began stressing that students in chiropractic colleges be required to study medical diagnosing and completing eliminating any testing in Chiropractic Philosophy.

One can easily see the end result of all this by looking at the ads in the yellow pages of a telephone book. Most ads are centered around back and neck pain and headaches. Few mention how the nervous system controls the entire body and must function correctly for the body to experience abundant health; that chiropractors are trained specialists in correcting subluxations of the spine.

So after a few good years of easy practice, chiropractors now find themselves in a limited practice, with limited insurance benefits and vastly increased numbers of practitioners.

It is true that the chiropractor of today knows far more about medical philosophy and diagnosing, but seems to lack the confidence and conviction once held by the chiropractic "pioneers." These old timers went into the chiropractic profession, largely because they had been helped for some health disorder and wanted to do the same for others. All you have to do is examine the case records of their practices and you will discover how they were helping thousands of sick folks get well. Many were seeing huge numbers of patients. In fact, many were earning far more than medical doctors in their communities.

These early pioneers of our profession practiced with a love and passion for chiropractic and their patients. Most practiced as long as they were able.

Today there is a movement to return to those exciting days of practicing chiropractic. One such opportunity is the philosophy program at Palmer college. Those who have completed the program have reported experiencing more passion as well as obtaining better results in helping their patients recover from illness as well as healthier lifestyles and purpose in being a chiropractor.

Also, those who have completed the LCP or the Diplomate in Philosophy programs seem to have developed a close

brotherhood. Even though they come from different schools, practice different types of techniques you can feel the closeness among the chiropractors in that group.

This spirit reminds me of the days I practiced chiropractic in Louisiana, when we are still unlicensed. Chiropractors were always welcome and made welcome by their colleagues. It didn't matter what time of day it was, there was always a cup of coffee, meal or even a bed if needed. You would find yourself talking to your fellow chiropractor about some difficult case that had responded to the chiropractic adjustment. Such conversations increased our confidence in chiropractic and what we could do to help our patients get better.

What can we do to help our situation today? I believe there are several things we can do. For instance:

- Go back to our philosophy
- Become more proficient in our adjusting techniques.
- Get ourselves adjusted on a regular basis and of course our families as well.
- Become more concerned about the laws being passed in our states.
- Become more politically involved with issues that will affect our way to practice chiropractic.
- Put pressure on the schools we graduated from. Stress to them the need to go back to the grass roots of our profession.

If each one of us begins doing this, I firmly believe that chiropractic will grow. Let's go back to the days of great practitioners like Gonstead, Bahan, Shears, Sherman and Williams. These men truly believed in chiropractic and shared their beliefs with their patients. When we begin doing this together and educating our patients about chiropractic then our profession will begin to grow again. The public wants what chiropractic offers, they just don't know where to find it. Once they do, they will come.

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