

The Chiropractic dilemma. To be isolated or integrated?

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In the 44 years since I became a Chiropractor the world has changed a great deal but ... has the chiropractic profession? In the last century chiropractors remained apart and distant from main stream health care. The profession believed it was unique and if it did not stay distant from medicine it would be swallowed up and lose its identity.

The chiropractic profession held different views on health and vitality that made it feel strong and independ-

ent as well as unique. We thought this health care model, based on strongly held *beliefs*, insulated us from any of the criticism about us levelled by other health professions. Instead we chose to believe there was acceptance of our health care model because our patients seemed to love us. The chiropractic profession thought it was the world that needed to change in order to understand our chiropractic paradigm. If they understood us then all people would be able to benefit from our life changing care. It was felt that once everyone was exposed to our “story” they would become believers too. That was “then” but, even today, some among us still cling to this ideology.

We are now in a new century where old ideals and beliefs may not be valid or even valuable. The chiropractic profession’s beliefs, formed long ago in the 1900’s or even up to the new millennium, need to change based on current evidence. Resisting critical self examination of our beliefs, practices and protocols is now irrelevant because others are doing it for us. The risk of ignoring an inward look at ourselves is that our profession may become redundant at first and then forgotten with the passage of time. It is as if some among us believe the earth is still flat! This group of chiropractors seem unable to allow fact and science to displace their unsustainable *belief* system. The time for change is upon us.

In some ways the chiropractic profession has made some significant changes in the last few years. For example, the quality of education offered to our new practitioners is a quantum leap ahead of even 10 or 15 years ago. Our research endeavours are amazing and continue to impress. These improvements have occurred even with many obstacles, especially outside funding, in our way. Never the less much has been accomplished.

Even with these positive changes, segments of the pro-

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fession refuse to let go of their old *beliefs*. I think this places the chiropractic profession at a cross roads. Down one path is continued isolation and separation from main stream health care. If this path is taken there is a real risk it will lead to our eventual demise. The chiropractic profession would become irrelevant because other professions can and will do what we do but, from within the system.

The other, more hopeful, path leads to the chiropractic profession integrating into mainstream health care as part of a much larger team. In this model the focus is on what is best for the patients we serve. Current evidence suggests that what we do best is care for musculoskeletal problems, in the broadest sense. The profession needs to continue to emphasize university level training, collaboration with other professions and continue to lead cutting edge research in spinal health care. The goal should be to always look after the patient's best interests by providing economic and effective care in a timely manner. Inherent in choosing this path is that some chiropractors would be compelled to give up dated or simplistic concepts.

We have a rich history as a profession. Many fine

people have contributed to our development and growth to this point. We can also be justifiably proud of our heritage. That being said ... there is much more to do. No profession can afford to stand still in this era of rapid change. Demanding and savvy consumers, as well as professional competition make staying the same a huge risk. I would suggest that one of our great weaknesses has been our willingness to accept the status quo. Looking back I can see the beginning of our profession over 100 years ago but, looking forward, I am unable to see a clearly defined future. We have failed in our efforts to develop an understandable and consistent identity. This is a weakness that hurts us. The public sees us as "back doctors". To me this is neither a bad thing nor in any way limiting. Unfortunately, we have no such clearly established image of ourselves. This confuses the public.

The chiropractic profession has so much to offer to the public. It is time to put our old beliefs to rest and establish a clear image that is in harmony with current evidence so we can get out and do what we do best! The choice is yours. When and how will you make it?