

Chiropractic History

CO Watkins, DC, FICC, Doctor of Humanities

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On June 6, 1987 at the seventh annual Conference on Chiropractic History the Northwestern College of Chiropractic (NWCC) posthumously awarded the Doctor of Humanities to CO Watkins, DC, FICC¹. The honorary doctorate, as noted by NWCC President Donald Cassata, is a coveted honor conferred by the College in very rare instances. The Doctor of Humanities is reserved for those few, very special individuals whose contributions to excellence in the science, art and philosophy of chiropractic represents an effort above and beyond the call of duty. CO Watkins' fifty year career, although unknown or forgotten by most in the profession today, is a story of single-minded devotion to the "sound professional advancement"² of his beloved chiropractic.

Claude O. Watkins was born in 1901 or 1902 to Welch immigrant farmers in Eagle Grove, Iowa. Inspired by the help rendered by a chiropractor to his mother, who had suffered a crippling hip injury, he enrolled in the Palmer School of Chiropractic (PSC) in 1923. These were trying times at PSC, owing to a growing division between the "Developer" and several of the faculty^{3,4}. At Lyceum (homecoming) during Watkins' second of three years at PSC, BJ Palmer epochally announced that only DCs who employed the newly developed neurocalometer to detect subluxations could be considered legitimate chiropractors⁵. Moreover, the new device (a 2-pronged heat sensing instrument) could not be purchased, but could only be leased from BJ Palmer⁶. These events and accompanying restrictions on academic freedom at PSC prompted several faculty to leave³, and profoundly influenced young Watkins. Although the philosophical link between Watkins and the founders of the Lincoln College of Chiropractic has not been verified, it seems likely that these educators helped to shape CO's lifelong aversion to dogma in chiropractic.

Dr. Watkins began his 51 year solo practice in Sidney, Montana in 1926, and soon (in 1929) launched the *Montana Chiropractor*, a monthly bulletin supported initially by the Montana Chiropractic Association (MCA), and later, as the *Chiropractor*, by the state associations of Idaho and Wyoming as well. Dr. Watkins wrote most of the articles himself at first, and Mrs. Watkins assisted as proofreader and typist. Regular features



CO Watkins

included a monthly review of a different chiropractic instrument, and reports of chiropractic legislative events. Montana chiropractor CR Grow recalls that "CO Watkins was one of the pioneer chiropractors in Montana.... I was told by one of the 'old-timers' that Dr. Watkins spent more time in our State Capitol in Helena than the people who were elected to the legislature"⁷.

Watkins' editorials encouraged his readers to join the newly formed National Chiropractic Association (NCA) and to seek

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the broader scope of practice which NCA recommended^{8,9}. In this first decade of his practice Watkins also began to write essays for the NCA's publication *The Chiropractic Journal* (later renamed the *National Chiropractic Journal*, then the *Journal of the NCA*). By October, 1966 Watkins had published at least two dozen essays in the NCA magazine and its successor, the *ACA Journal of Chiropractic*.

In 1934 Watkins, then secretary of the MCA, offered his "New Offensive" program in the NCA's *Journal*, in which he proposed a nationally standardized length of chiropractic instruction (5 years of 9 months each) for licensure, and an annual postgraduate course requirement for license renewal. Watkins' chiropractic "new deal" was offered as an alternative to the "damnable Basic Science laws"² which had been introduced in a number of states at the urging of the medical associations. CO's early orientation to chiropractic politics, characterized by resistance to medical domination but dissatisfaction with existing chiropractic standards, foreshadowed a 30 year effort to improve chiropractic education, research, clinical practice, and professional organization.

If John J. Nugent, DC¹⁰ may be considered the father of the Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE), then surely CO Watkins was its grandfather. It was Dr. Watkins who introduced the resolution in the NCA House of Delegates at the Los Angeles convention in 1935 which created the NCA Committee on Education (later to become the CCE through the ACA's direction), and who served as the Committee's first chairman (1935-1938). As a member of NCA's Board of Directors (1938-1943) Watkins helped to set the direction for Nugent's tenure (1941-1961) as the NCA Director of Education. Joseph Janse, DC, longtime president of the National College of Chiropractic, recalled of Watkins that "He defined so much good in behalf of the profession. He was a man of honesty and propriety and he lived with staunch strong convictions. We of the profession shall always be indebted to him for helping tailor the progress and security of the profession"¹¹. In 1935, however, as Watkins began his second decade as a chiropractor, his national professional activities were still just getting underway.

Watkins encouraged significant improvements in basic science training through the accreditation process, and in this he paralleled the views of the NCA leadership during the late 1930s and early 1940s. He was unable, however, despite his membership in the NCA's executive board, to convince the national leadership of the importance of clinical research in chiropractic practice, education, and professional organization. Walter B. Wolf, DC, an NCA delegate from South Dakota and later chairman of the CCE's Committee on Accreditation, recalls that Watkins "made several appearances before the Council on Education to advocate his concern for research. This was back during the days when Dr. John Nugent was director of education for the NCA However, his (Watkins') schedule of events was not popular when compared to so many other details that had to be accomplished"¹².

Dr. Watkins' schedule of events involved the conversion of chiropractic from dogmatic theories to active clinical investigations, from cultist indoctrination to scientifically based health care education, from unchecked clinical diversity to a theoretically based and empirically/experimentally validated health care technology. To accomplish this monumental task, he proposed that every chiropractic student should receive coursework in the philosophy of science and in practical research methodology. He recommended that "All should be trained in clinical research, as no one can tell who might discover a promising hypothesis for testing"¹³. "Science", he suggested, "is not judged upon its exactness, but rather upon the principles, attitudes, and working methods of those who make up the profession"¹⁴. Arthur Schierholz, DC, an NCA and ACA executive member recalled that "He firmly believed that clinical research would give chiropractic a scientific basis for acceptance. But his idea of having doctors do research in their offices was limited in that only a few are really dedicated to the detailed work involved with research. This, he could not understand. He firmly believed that every doctor of chiropractic could keep the required records"¹⁵. The NCA and ACA apparently did not appreciate the value of specifically training chiropractors to keep such records.

Frustrated in this campaign despite his apparent influence as Chairman of the NCA Board of Directors (1942-1943), CO turned his efforts to a clear, public statement about the state of professional organization in chiropractic and about the NCA's scientific responsibilities. In 1944 Watkins self-published *The Basic Principles of Chiropractic Government*¹⁶, in which he described the chiropractic "physician-scientist" model. The purpose of all chiropractic organization, he reasoned, should be to promote patient welfare through clinical research and supportive services. By focusing its efforts on future generations of chiropractors, that is, by training DC-scientists, a change in attitude and an increase in clinical research activities could be realized. Chiropractic colleges should be encouraged and supported by the national associations in their efforts to train DCs (students, faculty, field practitioners) for careers as part or full-time clinical investigators. Only through clinical research, he argued, could a sound basis for clinical practice, public relations and legal matters be established, and only through science could the profession unite in a meaningful way¹⁷.

Watkins' recommendations for clinical research training in the colleges and the field were ignored by the NCA. However, his teachings on the importance of research in chiropractic may have inspired the NCA to establish the CRF/Chiropractic Research Foundation (later to become the Foundation for Accredited Chiropractic Education, and now known as the FCER/Foundation for Chiropractic Education and Research) in 1944. Watkins was not optimistic about the CRF, however, since the strategy did not address what he considered to be chiropractic's core problems: lack of scientific orientation, education, and organization among chiropractors.

Watkins continued to express his concern for clinical studies

in his essays in the *National Chiropractic Journal*, the *Chiroline*, and the *Journal of the California Chiropractic Association*. Included among the twenty-two papers he published during 1944–1948 were nine^{14,16,18–24} which dealt with the philosophical basis of chiropractic organization, training and research methods. His contributions to the literature during this period also included several clinical reviews. Watkins served as president of the MCA during 1944–1948, and promoted continuing education for Montana doctors. WA Budden, DC, president of the Western States Chiropractic College was a frequent lecturer at state conventions during this period. Watkins' clinical essays appear to have been one part of his promotion of lifelong learning for chiropractors.

In the early 1950s Dr. Watkins' attention turned to national politics. He was outspoken in his criticism of McCarthyism and other political extremes on the grounds that the far left and far right held to doctrines which limited free speech. His 1953 self-published essay "The Watkins Plan to Stop Communism" provided an alternative to the fearful excesses of the day. In the late 1950s and early 1960s his willingness to confront the John Birch Society in speeches and newspaper articles led to his invited address to the National Education Association at their 1962 convention in Denver.

In the mid-1960s CO renewed his efforts with the ACA and its colleges. "In 1965 or 1966 he came to the ACA headquarters determined to sell the staff on instituting a clinical research program in the membership or in the Colleges At that time the colleges involved in the accreditation movement were struggling and striving in every manner possible to upgrade the curriculum qualitatively. Dr. Watkins was ahead of the profession"¹⁵. In addition to his lobbying efforts at ACA headquarters, Watkins distributed at least six private essays to the ACA leadership and colleges during his term as Chairman of the ACA Committee on Clinical Research (1966–1967). In these works he reasserted the differences between dogma and clinical science, and again urged development of chiropractic "physician-scientists".

Palmer College's radiology department chairman, Roy W. Hildebrandt, DC (later the founding editor of *National College's Journal of Manipulative & Physiological Therapeutics*) wrote to Watkins in 1968 to express his admiration for CO's written efforts, but by this time Watkins had thrown in the towel. In a letter to Harlin Larson, DC in August, 1967 Watkins noted: "It would be necessary for the colleges to head up such a program, and it would spread from the colleges to the field. Most of the colleges, if not all, favor the plan but do nothing about it. Of course we could start a program of clinical research in the field using my committee on clinical research for the purpose. The big question then would be whether the colleges could make cultists faster than we could reorient them to science. This with other things causes me to wonder if it is all worth the effort"²⁵.

Dr. Watkins continued his essays and letters to the editors of newspapers in Montana during his final decade. He continued also in private practice in Sidney until his stroke in early 1977;

he died six months later. Watkins is not listed in the necrology provided by *Who's Who in Chiropractic*, but his teachings have influenced the ACA Council on Technic²⁷ through the efforts of Dr. Ted Shrader, who has republished Watkins'¹⁶ *Basic Principles*. The story of Watkins' career was retold at the history conference²⁸, and the resolution of the Board of Trustees of the Northwestern College of Chiropractic is presented in Table 1.

Dr. CO Watkins was a man ahead of his time. His philosophy of the science of chiropractic provides a vision of an integrated philosophy, science and art which can be implemented by any DC who chooses to²⁹. The direction he proposed for the profession seems as relevant today as it was in 1944, and could provide a basis for "sound professional advancement". Northwestern College of Chiropractic is proud to include him as an honorary alumnus, and to have accepted a part of his challenge: to train the next generation of DCs to meet the responsibilities of the chiropractic science and art.

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Table 1 Resolution of the Board of Trustees of the Northwestern College of Chiropractic

- WHEREAS, C.O. Watkins, D.C. was a pioneer in Montana chiropractic, serving his patients for more than fifty years of clinical practice, and
- WHEREAS, C.O. Watkins, D.C., respectful of, and a proponent of high educational standards in chiropractic colleges, served as the first chairman of the National Chiropractic Association's Committee on Educational Standards (1935-1938), and
- WHEREAS, C.O. Watkins, D.C. articulated the message of chiropractic as a founding editor and prolific writer, and
- WHEREAS, C.O. Watkins, D.C. served his professional loyalty by promoting the highest of professional ethics, leading the chiropractic ranks as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Chiropractic Association from 1938-1943, and
- WHEREAS, C.O. Watkins, D.C., a voice heard ahead of his time, forged a frontier of leadership as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Chiropractic Association, 1942-1943, and as the President of the Montana Chiropractic Association from 1944-1948, and
- WHEREAS, C.O. Watkins, D.C. stood alone as a tireless and eloquent advocate of clinical research as a unifying force in the science, art and philosophy of chiropractic, and
- WHEREAS, C.O. Watkins, D.C. rallied the cause of research as Chairman of the Committee on Research of the National Chiropractic Association in 1951, and later, as Chairman of the Committee on Clinical Research of the American Chiropractic Association in 1966-1967, we

the Northwestern College of Chiropractic Board of Trustees, do HEREBY, by virtue of the authority invested in us by the state of Minnesota, confer upon C.O. Watkins, D.C. the Honorary Degree of DOCTOR OF HUMANITIES on this day, the Sixth of June, Nineteen Hundred Eighty-Seven.

Donald M. Cassata, Ph.D.
President of College

Irvin C. Holtz, D.C.
President, Board of Trustees

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