



Chiropractic in Alberta

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Alberta's population is 2.5 million, out of which 250,000 people (10%) visit the province's 320 chiropractors every year.

In 1982-83, Alberta Government paid out a total provincial medical bill of \$466,522,104 out of which Alberta chiropractors were paid \$18,755,116 (4%). Payment per chiropractic visit is \$11.50. Alberta chiropractors may extra-bill.

Government relations are generally good, with a new Act already passed and awaiting proclamation. This will give Alberta the most progressive chiropractic legislation in Canada. Included in its benefits is a continuing education demand of up to 24 hours per year, without which a chiropractor can lose his or her licence. There is also provision for the profession to access X-rays and laboratory records from public institutions. But the main thrust of the Act is to make the Albertan chiropractic profession self governing, and self disciplining.

In my view, when the final proclamation of our new Act is made sometime in 1986, chiropractic in Alberta will be seen to be the fully-fledged profession our pioneers hoped that it would eventually become.

In the meantime, the high cost and rising cost of health care is a serious concern. This has been reflected in some of the public pronouncements by members of Government, when chiropractic in particular has been mentioned as one of the health care professions that might be dropped from Alberta Government Health Care provisions.

We have fought such a suggestion successfully so far, and have gone public with our comments, eliciting wide media coverage, and much public support for the profession as well as a retraction from the Cabinet Minister concerned. However, we have deliberately adopted a position of partnership with the Government on health care matters. We no longer see ourselves as mere petitioners for more money: a white collar trade union. We wish to be seen as responsible public citizens with input on matters of public concern, and to take our proper place as a profession in the democratic process. I feel that this approach will be one of the main features of our activities in the years to come, and that we will be seen less and less as an adversary by Albertan governments, of whatever party.

As a result of our new approach to partnership in Government, we have already proposed a computerised method of accounting to save Alberta health care several millions of dollars a year, and are in active negotiation with Government on the matter.

The Association is considering other radical recommendations to the Government to further reduce health care costs in the province. One of the suggestions under consideration is to reduce annual increases to the MD majority and raise the income of the chiropractic minority so as to attain parity. This could be justified on the basis of the demonstrable cost-

effectiveness of chiropractic. Other suggestions under consideration include saving millions of dollars by allowing chiropractors to refer directly to specialists.

We have had excellent relations with the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board since its inception. Dr Bryan Redpath, vice-president of the Association, is a consultant to the Board.

The Association is funding research at Calgary University on, "Assessment of the effect of treatment on forces in the low back", by Dr Robbie Robinson DC, and Dr Benno Nigg, and "Effects of sacroiliac adjustment on gait" by Dr W. Herzog Ph.D and Dr Nigg. Dr Nigg is an internationally eminent professor of bio-mechanics.

On the question of public education, we now have a vigorous public relations programme managed by the same consultancy which manages the PR programmes for the British Columbia Chiropractic Association and CCA. The programme regularly gets members of the board and individual members of the Association on radio and TV, and in the press, throughout the province, and further afield. One Albertan chiropractor now has his own radio chat show. I have never seen such widespread, positive media coverage for the profession in all my days in practice.

As a consequence, I feel there is a difference in the profession's treatment by the media. It is becoming clear that the profession is increasingly regarded as a part of Albertan public affairs, and its statements, news releases and commentaries are treated seriously.

In 1985, the Association moved its headquarters into high profile professional office accommodation in one of Edmonton's prestigious down-town hotel-office-apartment complexes. Staffed by a full time secretary, the offices also have a convenient, fully serviced board room.

The profession's task in Alberta is clear: With only 10% of the population using chiropractic regularly, there is considerable room for improvement in our programmes of public education. Also, chiropractic must be seen to be taking its proper place in Albertan public affairs by adopting a responsible role in reducing the cost of Albertan health care.