

### Patient-Centred Care: A foundation of chiropractic



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A quarter of a century ago, on May 5<sup>th</sup> 1984 to be precise, I was on Front Street in Toronto outside of the Royal York Hotel looking up at the sky and thinking that I was finally a Doctor of Chiropractic! Moments before, I had stood up at Convocation with all the members of my graduating class from the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College to raise our right hands and recite the Chiropractic Oath. It is a beautiful oath and these words stand out for me:

“I will at all times stand ready to serve humanity, without distinction of race, creed or colour, in my lifelong vocation of preventing and alleviating human suffering, wherever it may be found, by exemplifying in my own life a pattern of living in harmony with the laws of nature.

“May God so direct the skilful use of my hands that I may bring strength to the sick, relief to the suffering, peace of mind to the anxious, and inspiration to all hu-

manity to attain bountiful health that we may live this life to the fullest expression of its innate endowments.”

That moment in time fused my commitment to the ethical practice of chiropractic to best serve the population. It was the beginning of an amazing journey that has seen much change in the profession over the succeeding decades, yet some essential truths remain the same. Foremost among those is that same commitment to patient-centred care I made that day in 1984.

Patient-centred care means putting what is best for the patient ahead of what is good for the practice or the practitioner. It may seem obvious, but the distinction can become blurred, especially in difficult economic times. Indeed, patient-centred care has been a hallmark of the chiropractic profession and study after study demonstrates the strong satisfaction patients have with their relationship with their practitioner and with the relief they experience from chiropractic treatment. I would suggest it is a strength we can build on in today's troubled economy.

Dwindling health care resources, and private and government insurance cutbacks are affecting both practitioners and patients in all disciplines. There is less money to go around and the public's pocket books are stretched. All health care interventions are under increased pressure to demonstrate their cost-effectiveness and mature responsibility to care. Chiropractic is well positioned to do this.

The Canadian Chiropractic Association's vision “for every Canadian to have full and equitable access to chiropractic care” has never been more relevant. We know that musculoskeletal disorders cost the health care system billions every year and that MDs' offices and emergency rooms are crowded with the types of complaints that DCs are superbly trained to manage. There is an important opportunity in the years ahead to build more bridges into multi-disciplinary care settings and institutions to ensure Canadians receive the best care possible. We owe it to our patients, to the health of the health care system, and to our mandate as health care professionals.

At the CCA, we are opening dialogue on many fronts in Ottawa. Most recently, these conversations were rewarded with enhanced chiropractic coverage for members of the RCMP. Similar discussions are underway with the Department of National Defence and aboriginal peoples. Chiropractic integration into family care clinics

and institutional settings continues to grow and significantly more DCs are working in multi-disciplinary practices today compared to ten years ago. We must continue to build on these initiatives and trends to ensure that the burden of neuromusculoskeletal disorders in Canada receives the attention it deserves.

With that in mind, I would suggest that the only way to achieve such a vision is through a unified and focused approach. I like to compare the profession to a symphony orchestra. In an orchestra, each and every musician is autonomous and can individually play their own instrument. But in order to play a Mozart or Beethoven symphony, the conductor has to make sure all play in concert and harmony. If we are to meet the challenges – and take advantage of the opportunities – of the current health care environment, we need to have our own symphony and all play together.

What does that look like? It means common messages and a clear unified position on the value of chiropractic care to the health system. It means messages and evidence based on solid research. It means a co-ordinated approach to reaching out to other health care professionals, institutions, governments and insuring agencies. It means networking at the grassroots level in the communities where each of you practice, at the provincial level where health care is delivered, and at the national level where broad public policies are shaped.

We each have a role to play. I strongly encourage you to be active in your communities and become ambassadors – not for chiropractic care – but for patients and the relief of neuromusculoskeletal dysfunction. Become acquainted with other health care professionals in your

community. Share your expertise and be a public educator on the prevention of NMSK problems. Sharing, not selling, will be the key to a greater appreciation of how a better approach to treatment of NMSK issues will benefit the economy, the health care system and the public.

2009 promises to be a pivotal year. Earlier this year, the Board of Governors of the CCA held a five year strategic planning meeting to assess the current health care environment, evaluate our present activities, and identify how best to move forward. This spring, Canadian chiropractors will come together at a summit meeting of all of our national and provincial organizations: regulatory, association, educational, research and risk management. This meeting is the first of its kind and is an important opportunity to develop a shared vision of the future and determine how we can best work together to maximize our efforts and resources.

Following on the heels of the summit meeting is the World Federation of Chiropractic international congress in Montreal at the end of April. This is the first time a world congress has been held in Canada and it will be another stimulating opportunity for our profession to think and work and learn together.

At the end of the day, the common denominator of the profession is the patient. My reason for choosing to become a chiropractor was to be a health care provider in a system that offered choices of care to the patient. Economic strains have chipped away at health care consumers' choices and the burden of NMSK problems has been trivialized as 'aches and pains'. We must become ambassadors for our patients first and foremost if we are to grow and thrive as a profession.

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