

The Update

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The Third Paradigm: The Chiropractic Profession's Best Chance for Survival

By Judy Campanale, DC, ACP

Today, the call for unity echoes in every corner of the chiropractic profession. Most recently, the Congress of Chiropractic State Associations (COCSA) led the cheer when they demanded a merge between the two largest national organizations, the American Chiropractic Association (ACA) and the International Chiropractors Association (ICA) (*Dynamic Chiropractic*, May 7, 2007, Volume 25, Issue 10). COCSA seemed to agree with Yvonne Villanueva-Russell's position in her article "Gynecological Neurologists and Other Lessons of History," where regarding professional survival she states that the advantage goes to "(p)rofessions with a singularity of purpose and vision..." Similarly, the COCSA Resolution on National Unity states that, "Whereas, the conflict resulting from the existence of two competing national associations serves as an impediment to the advancement for the chiropractic profession..." Unfortunately, the call for the merger disregards every other important point that history might teach and puts the survival of the chiropractic profession at risk.

It is true that a merger would appear to solve the problem of singularity of purpose, which can threaten a profession's existence. However, it would not address the reason why there are multiple organizations in the chiropractic profession in the first place. Interestingly, the resolution was developed and published because the group agreed that the greatest challenge today was that doctors are

working too hard for too little. They had concerns about access to patients, limitations on scope and ever-shrinking reimbursement levels. In a follow-up interview with COCSA President, Jerry DeGrado, DC, he stated, "if we ever expect to resolve the Medicare issue, the profession must first of all be on the same page. Our efforts must be clearly aligned behind a single objective. We must be one body, one voice." In fact, the chiropractic profession is not of a single objective. While some, even many or most, may be concerned with third party reimbursement, others are not. They are happy with their level of reimbursement or they run cash practices. They would rather efforts be spent on marketing or at this point on the survival of the profession rather than the survival of the practitioner. The point is they have a completely different objective. Hence, the existence of multiple, national chiropractic organizations.

What's more, merging the ACA and the ICA would not address the important issues that threaten the survival of the chiropractic profession today. Parity and reimbursement issues may significantly impact the majority of chiropractors in our profession, but that is due to the fact that they compete with a variety of other professionals in the domain called "health care." If this continues to be the field on which the chiropractic profession plays, they will undoubtedly eventually fail to survive. Villanueva-Russell does an excellent job of describing the history of professions that have engaged in jurisdictional

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battles, and it seems clear that a unified national organization won't address the bigger issue that if chiropractors fight for the same patients as the medical doctors chiropractic will certainly face absorption or death. If the success of a profession "lies in defining claims of expertise with a balance of scope, breadth and legitimacy" then the score is Medicine 4, Chiropractic 0. If the chiropractic profession remains as it is today, they certainly could not win a jurisdictional battle with regards to diagnosis as Reginald Gold points out in his article, "The Third Paradigm." They would also fail miserably with respect to their scope and breadth, which would either be seen as too broad in the case of the Paradigm One practitioner or too small in the case of the Paradigm Two practitioner.

If "(t)he goal is for a profession to carve a niche out for themselves by achieving control and legitimacy over an area they can monopolize with unique, unduplicated expertise," then Gold's Third Paradigm offers a promising alternative. Since it is non-therapeutic in nature it immediately eliminates the issue of jurisdictional battles since chiropractors would no longer compete for the same domain as the medical doctors, the physical therapists, et al. Also, no other professional currently addresses vertebral subluxation so chiropractic would clearly have the edge in claims making. While other professions do include manual manipulation of the spine, their objective is entirely different from that of the Third Paradigm chiropractor. If "staking a territory is crucially important—perhaps more important than the actual process of achieving results with patients" then chiropractic's future would look bright indeed. This paradigm is the only one that is both unique and non-duplicative.

However, choosing "The Third Paradigm" as a path for the future of chiropractic would not be without it's own challenges. This paradigm is based on a philosophy, a series of logical, rational thinking that is not always apparent to the layperson. While it may be clear to the practitioner, there are concepts that the public finds difficult to grasp. It is

hard to demonstrate the existence of a vertebral subluxation, for example, and harder still to measure outcomes when one has been successfully corrected. Some of this may be because of the intangible component of the vertebral subluxation. However, it is also at least partially due to the complacency of man described by Ayn Rand in her essay "Philosophy: Who Needs It." If what Ayn Rand says is indeed true, that the reason to study philosophy is "in self-protection—and in defense of truth, justice, freedom, and any value you ever held or may ever hold," then the time to study chiropractic philosophy is now.

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Got something on your mind that you would like to share?

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FSCO@straightchiropractic.org with the words "FSCO Update" in the subject line.

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