



Patient Education in the 21st Century

There are a few things we need to recognize relative to how chiropractic is perceived in the healthcare marketplace. We also need to understand that today's healthcare consumer is much more discerning when it comes to spending their precious financial resources on healthcare of any kind. With almost 50 million Americans without healthcare insurance, paying for any healthcare becomes a careful selection process for most consumers.

A few decades ago when I first got into practice, every form of advertising seemed to draw new patients. As the years rolled on, better advertisement campaigns seemed to bring fewer results. Today, few consumers are swayed into chiropractic offices by advertisements of any kind.

By Robert Braille, DC, FICA



Posters and pamphlets are important, but neither of these by themselves will take a person who is not considering chiropractic and bridge them over into considering our paradigm for health care.

This is because advertising of a concept that is “discontinuous” from the accepted norm only grabs a small segment of the population who would usually jump at something new and different. With chiropractic having hit a higher level of usage in the general population, most of these “you had me on hello” consumers are already chiropractic patients. The more difficult task ahead is persuading the remainder of the population that is more skeptical toward something as different from their norms as chiropractic.

To convert these portions of the population to chiropractic we will need substantive education. No longer will cute cartoon posters or snappy pamphlets do the job to convert a person to chiropractic, unless they have reached the desperate stage. Now don’t get me wrong, posters and pamphlets are important, but neither of these by themselves will take a person who is not considering chiropractic and bridge them over into considering our paradigm for health care.

Buying advertisements or engaging in a public relations campaign is not the answer. As a profession, we cannot compete dollar for dollar with the pharmaceutical industry with purchasing airtime. According to the August 16, 2007 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the drug industry spent \$29.9 billion on promotions in 2005. Of that, \$4.2 billion was direct to consumer advertising. Compare this with the \$8-9 billion the chiropractic profession grosses and you quickly see that we cannot win in a spending war.

To be effective in converting consumers to chiropractic, we must change mindsets. To do this, consumer chiropractic education must have substance and credibility. Whether real or perceived,

the general public sees news sources as credible portals for health care information. What appears on TV, in the newspaper, or to a lesser extent, on the Internet, is considered credible in most people's minds. This concept is hard for most chiropractors to accept as we watch TV and read news stories with a much more critical eye. However, the general population is much more accepting of the evening news than we are.

So how do we educate the public in a way that is both credible and substantive? The answer to this question involves three items. First is the creation of positive press and news where possible. Second is gathering and collating those

resources that support our position and make the case for the chiropractic paradigm. And third is dissemination of these credible pieces of information and news to your patients and the community. Let's look at each of these individually and see where we can get the most bang for the buck.

Creation of Positive Press

This is easier than most people think. I review most news services daily and I can tell you that many doctors of chiropractic get positive press for things such as new facilities, new equipment, years of service, anniversaries and testimonials. The key here is persistence. Creating a press release or story about your office may seem self

serving, but many local news outlets will see this as interesting local articles. Submitting news and press releases to local papers and TV news shows should be a regular part of your clinic's educational program. If you can enlist patients into giving you their testimonials, you will have an even better shot at getting placement either in printed media or on TV.

Submission of these self-created news items should be done

through both local connections and through PR companies who specialize in these areas. A simple Google search online for "free PR" returns a bevy of companies that offer services for submission of press releases.

Most of these companies offer some level of free service but they also try to sell you a higher level of service for a fee. If your news is good enough, I do not believe you should have to pay for placement. On a local level, placement of news stories does not involve anything more than effort and follow-up.

On a recent *Montel Williams* show, Montel talked about chiropractic helping him with MS. He then brought his chiropractor on the show. This is one good example of how one testimonial can get national attention. Additionally, ABC's *Good Morning America* recently did a segment hosted by Robin Roberts on chiropractic helping high blood pressure. This



is the kind of positive press that we could not afford to purchase.

One of the other things you can do to create news is to use online posting sites such as YouTube. Some of the chiropractic videos that are online have received tens of thousands of views with several into the hundreds of thousands.

A video testimonial from a patient whose life has been changed will draw viewers and help cast a positive light on you and chiropractic.

Gathering and Collating News

Years ago many of my colleagues and I would keep three-ring binders in our waiting rooms filled with news clippings of positive press

articles on chiropractic. This may seem antiquated by today's standards, but I remember that this binder of news was one of the most read items in my waiting room. Today, with the Internet, the binders can be replaced with websites and email newsletters.

Without any help from us, most people might only see a positive chiropractic news story once a year. However, I can tell you that there are positive stories and videos available online every day. Your job is to bring these news stories to your patients and your community. This can

be done in part by chiropractic website services, but to make it most effective, you must put some effort into the process yourself.

It is easier than you think to link or embed YouTube videos into your website. YouTube even creates the code needed to directly embed videos into your website. I recommend that you change

the link weekly to feature a new "Video of the Week." Imagine how current and credible your website looks when you embed the YouTube video from *Good Morning America* with Robin Roberts talking about chiropractic helping blood pressure!

You can also link positive print news stories into your website to create a "Link Resources"

page. Again, this requires some work on your part but it does bring stories from around the world to your patients and community. Many doctors print stories that are linked into their websites and hand them out to patients in their offices as weekly articles. This not only generates interest in chiropractic, but it usually drives people to your website.

Dissemination of News

Email newsletters are a wonderful tool if used properly and if the news in the newsletter



is credible. This is easier said than done for the average chiropractor. Writing a newsletter requires writing skills that not everyone possesses. And, since I write a monthly newsletter, I can tell you that finding positive chiropractic news that has a broad appeal is not always that easy. Most times it is a lot easier to find wellness articles, or stories of medical failures, as the popular press is ripe with these. But with some effort, you can find positive chiropractic stories to write about.

The key here is credibility. It is just not as strong when you write a story that says chiropractic works, as when you disseminate a story that says “according to the *New York Times*, chiropractic works.” As a rule, people like agreement. It adds agreement and credibility when they hear recognized news sources, either in print or on TV, are touting the benefits of chiropractic. Finding and writing such stories on a regular basis may be beyond the effort level of many busy DCs in practice, and therefore subscribing to a service may be the best option. However, regular dissemination of this type of news story, either in a newsletter or by email blasts, is a process that all practitioners can accomplish with little effort.

Conclusion

Making credible educational material available to people can convert skeptical consumers into chiropractic patients. Take, for instance, the patient who comes to you and says, “Doctor, I love chiropractic. I have this neighbor who has migraine headaches really bad. Is there anything you can give me that I can give them on migraines?” The response from most DCs is usu-

ally to hand that patient a pamphlet on chiropractic and headaches. As good as that pamphlet may be, do we really believe that a tri-fold brochure is enough to change the mindset of someone to get them to try chiropractic care? This may happen in some cases of desperation, it will not be enough on its own.

How much stronger would it be in this scenario if you could say, “Have your neighbor look on my website as I have 12 articles on migraines there.” Your answer could also be, “Give your neighbor a copy of this article from *USA Today* that talks about the benefits of chiropractic for migraine sufferers.” Now your neighbor is armed with credible news or articles with references from sources that the general public considers accepted. This adds a lot of leverage to those patients attempting to make referrals to their neighbors and friends.

Overall, good patient and community education requires adding credibility to that education. Credibility comes in the form of citing sources of agreement for what we are saying. The more it looks like everyone is endorsing chiropractic, the less resistance there is. Conversion of the consumer to chiropractic becomes a lot easier, when they begin to believe that their resistance to chiropractic has become a minority view.



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