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Consensus without Uniformity

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By the time you read this, the Mercy Center Conference (conference for the establishment of guidelines for chiropractic quality assurance and standards of practice) will be part of chiropractic history. But at the time of this writing, the Mercy Center Conference is still a few days away.

Looking over the past three years, it is intriguing to see how this event has come to pass. The first mention of a "Chiropractic Summit" appeared in a front page article, "The Time Has Come" of the April 1, 1989 issue of *Dynamic Chiropractic*.

This was quickly followed by letters endorsing the idea from the American Chiropractic Association (ACA), the Congress of Chiropractic State Associations (COCSA), the Federation of Straight Chiropractic Organizations (FSCO), and the International Chiropractors Association (ICA) that were printed on page 3 of the May 15, 1989 issue. (Imagine these four organizations agreeing on a conference of this importance.)

In addition to COCSA, ACA and ICA, the Canadian Chiropractic Association, the Association of Chiropractic Colleges, the Federation of Chiropractic Licensing Boards (FCLB), the Foundation for Chiropractic Education and Research (FCER), and several other organizations joined together to sponsor a chiropractic summit, later to be called the Mercy Center Conference. This provided the broad based support needed to make this conference representative of the entire profession.

The leadership and guidance of Scott Haldeman, D.C., M.D., Ph.D., as conference chairman has been seen over the past few years in how well this conference has dovetailed with all that is happening on a national level (the RAND study, AHCPR Low Back Pain Panel, etc.). The initial steering committee, which included Alan Adams, D.C., Gerard Clum, D.C., Daniel Hansen, D.C., William Meeker, D.C., M.P.H., Reed Phillips, D.C., Ph.D., and John Triano, M.A., D.C., was able to put together an eminent group of 35 DCs that represents a true cross section of the chiropractic profession.

The 35 committee members cover the entire spectrum of chiropractic thought and opinion. These DCs only represent themselves, even though most of them are affiliated with any number of chiropractic organizations. Some of those involved are typical of "average clinicians." Most committee members are practicing chiropractors. These clinicians will be adopting standards of care they feel comfortable with in their daily practices. Each member involved, politician, researcher, academician, or clinician, has shown a dedication to the profession that would make you proud.

Imagine a conference that includes all facets of the profession coming together for six days to propel the chiropractic profession into its second hundred years. Imagine at the same table: Ralph Boone, D.C., Ph.D., (president of SCASA and Southern California College of Chiropractic) working with James Winterstein, D.C., (vice president of CCE and president of National College of Chiropractic), and Gerard Clum, D.C., (president of the Association of Chiropractic Colleges and Life College of Chiropractic - West). Imagine James Gregg, D.C., (ICA President) and Louis Sportelli, D.C., (immediate past ACA chairman of the board) exchanging ideas in an effort to bring forth the best guidelines possible.

The conference will be held at a retreat center, a unique, quiet setting without the usual distractions of a big, bustling, and impersonal hotel. Chiropractic's first practice guidelines will be melded at a retreat.

While unity is still more of an ideal than a reality, consensus is here NOW! This historic time will see the first established chiropractic practice guidelines ever to be developed by the profession as a whole.

Across the country, local governments and third party payers are demanding practice guidelines from all health care professions that want to be included. It is very clear that any profession that cannot produce its own practice guidelines will be subject to guidelines produced for them. Without our own guidelines, every government agency and insurance company in every state across the country would have DCs dancing to their tune. Chiropractic in each state would die or flourish based on the whims of economically burdened politicians. Our future would no longer be in our hands.

The Mercy Center Conference is a united effort by the chiropractic profession to establish its own practice guidelines, using accepted consensus methods. The proceedings from this conference will be a living document that will be modified and amended as our profession grows and develops: a document that won't be perfect, but strives to be.

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