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Futile Care -- Medicine (and the Public) Wake Up

An Opportunity We've Been Looking For

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The article, "One Community Looks for Consensus on 'Futile Care'" (American Medical News September 20, 1993) reports on recent attempts to manage what is termed "futile care." It seems that Denver hospitals and the public are coming together in a series of forums to discuss what types of care for terminal patients should be considered "futile" and therefore inappropriate.

This demonstrates the growing willingness of the medical profession to admit that they don't have all the answers (not that it is any surprise to the rest of the world). In addition, the public is showing that it is willing to accept the limitations of critical care and the economic impracticalities of spending thousands of dollars per minute to keep terminally ill patients alive.

The focus is turning toward "quality of life" care. For those unfortunate victims of AIDS, terminal cancer, and other fatal ailments, health care professions are recognizing the need for treatment that enhances these patients' lives, but may not actually lengthen them.

The ability of medicine and the public to recognize the inappropriateness of futile care is a new opportunity for chiropractic. In the past, chiropractic care was not even considered with terminal patients, as the Marcus Welbys of medicine used every machine, drug, and procedure (many of them experimental) to see if they could "save" the patient from eventual death.

Recently, however, people are recognizing that the "cure" is sometimes worse than the ailment. There is also concern of the ethics of using the terminally ill as guinea pigs. One has to question a situation where a desperate patient (and family) are given false hope by the "wonders" of modern medicine.

One of the reasons why chiropractic care has been so effective for athletes is that their bodies are so finely tuned. The slightest loss (or increase) of function translates into the difference between victory and defeat.

The same holds true for the terminally ill.

In a world where medicine has promised far more than it could ever hope to deliver, people no longer accept these promises with much enthusiasm. The public is already disenchanted, and this is not the time for grandstanding.

There is an opportunity to care for the terminally ill and conduct research to demonstrate the role and benefits of chiropractic care for these unfortunate patients. Once established, it will not require a leap of faith to suggest that chiropractic may not only increase quality of life, but may also extend survival rates.

Once again, "alternative" health care has a chance to demonstrate its value. All chiropractic needs are some research funds and a chance to show our stuff.

Medicine has already disappointed a very expectant society. This is the time for chiropractic to wisely demonstrate what we believe to be true before we too make promises we may not be able to keep.

The "wonders of chiropractic" have yet to be fully demonstrated to the world. As the current trustees of this incredible healing gift, we have a great opportunity to uncover a much bigger part of the iceberg that is the power of chiropractic care.

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