



Dynamic Chiropractic – March 26, 1993, Vol. 11, Issue 07

Introducing Chiropractic to the Ukraine

By Gregory White, DC

Three chiropractic doctors and seven laymen packed portable adjusting tables and baggage for an historic and memorable 16-day adventure to the Ukraine.

The chiropractic delegation was represented by DCs Scott Isacson (Branford, Connecticut), Eric Gebhart (Freeport, Texas), and Lee Walden (Evansville, Indiana), members of the Christian Chiropractors Association.

Spreading out across the northern border of the great Black Sea, the Ukraine is the third largest in area and the second largest in population of the former Soviet republics (51,700,000, 1989 census). Known for its rich black soil, the Ukraine is the wheat belt of the Commonwealth States; it is also rich in coal, iron, and other metals.

"Our mission as a team of DCs and laymen," said Dr. Lee Walden, "was to share our professional expertise regarding chiropractic principles, techniques, and academic requirements with the medical milieu, and treat as many patients as we could while there."

The Ukraine's newfound sense of freedom after being under Soviet domination for 73 years is clearly a difficult transition. The Christian DCs reported the country's uncertainty and fears regarding privatization of assets, free enterprise, a different monetary structure, and the ensuing inflation. In short, an entire new set of priorities for the Ukrainians.

"It was into this environment we were called to treat and minister," related Dr. Walden. "Everyone there was very cordial, sincere, and grateful for our visit, and many were quite amazed we would take our personal time to treat and minister to them." The chiropractic team visited several medical hospitals and were pleased with the positive results they got for their patients.

Dr. Eric Gebhart recounts his encounter and dialogue with the medical staffs of several hospitals. "Although there are many doctors of manual therapy, they did not have chiropractic, though some called it that. From what I observed and was told, their system is a general, broad and gross nonspecific osteopathic style of manipulation, not as specific as the chiropractic adjustment."

Dr. Gebhart reports the hospitals do a lot of preparatory or ancillary procedures such as massage, traction, heat, acupuncture, and some muscle stimulation. They seem to base most of their manipulation on the work of Czech osteopath Carl Leavitt, though they did have a book on trigger point work by MDs Travell and Simmon in one hospital. There were also different levels of finesse and expertise in the different cities. The doctors in Kiev seemed more akin to what we DCs do than the doctors in Chernovtsy and Odessa.

While many patients said they had received some manipulation or had been to see a DC, after being adjusted by the American DCs, they admitted the treatment was nothing like they had previously received. "I had one incident in the hospital in Dnepropetrovsk," relates Dr. Gebhart, "where the chief orthopedist brought a patient in for me to examine and treat whose condition had become worse after receiving a manipulation from a 'chiropractor.'"

In the Ukraine, as in other countries where chiropractic is not regulated, there is a problem with individuals such as massage therapist taking a two or three month course and taking the title "chiropractor."

Dr. Gebhart spoke with and adjusted a vascular surgeon who raised some questions about this issue and cervical spine adjusting. He learned that Ukrainian doctors of manual therapy undergo a standard medical education after which they specialize in orthopedics, traumatology, surgery, etc., followed by a five-month program to learn manipulation. They were quite impressed and surprised by the length of our training in adjusting. It also appears their manual therapy system was simply that -- a system that addresses back and neck pain. Most patients therefore receive such diagnoses as osteochondritis, osis radiculitis, or a "bloc."

They were clearly unfamiliar with all the components of the USC, other than its effect on bone and joint. They definitely did not use manipulation to affect a person's over-all body health.

What about future contact? The doctors there have a strong desire to learn more about chiropractic and our system because of their lack of allopathic remedies. We saw very little medication and their hospitals were not equipped to handle much surgery. Maybe that's good.

Dr. Lee Walden rejoins, "Everywhere we went, we were well received and were invited to return as soon as we could and stay as long as we like. These invitations were from the top officials in the hospitals and clinics. I believe they were very sincere."

While the Ukraine welcomes and adopts new technologies, and innovation, there is an acute lack for medical equipment in their hospitals. They do not have many of the basics: stethoscopes, needles, syringes, anesthetic, and x-ray units. Some hospitals do not even have central heating.

The chiropractic team was heartened by the reception they received in both the chiropractic and spiritual sense. Dr. Gebhart is already planning to return. "Working together the way we did, as a team of doctors, taught me more about chiropractic and has done more for me than any management seminar.

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