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## **Life U. -- Building the Foundation for Chiropractic in Costa Rica**

By Medhat Alaftar, MD,DC, director of international programs, Life University

We read with interest the story you published concerning Shawn Dill,DC, and his chiropractic activities in Costa Rica.<sup>1</sup> While everything Dr. Dill relates in his article is accurate, he was remiss in not mentioning the involvement of Life University and the Life Foundation in Costa Rica, which laid the groundwork for the establishment of chiropractic in that country.

Dr. Dill arrived in San Jose in 1995, long after Life University had opened dialogue with the government of Costa Rica and the University in San Jose. We signed an agreement of academic exchange with the University of Costa Rica in October of 1992 and a faculty member from that University, Mrs. Yolanda Comacho, entered Life University as a full-time chiropractic student the following year. Yolanda has since graduated from Life University and has returned to her home country as its first native chiropractor.

Life University has sent faculty members to Costa Rica to participate in international symposia hosted by the University of Costa Rica on three different occasions between 1996 and 1998.

Another faculty member from the University of San Jose, Mr. Luis Roberto Sibaja, who is also a nationally known soccer coach in Costa Rica, has now come to Marietta, Georgia to pursue a master's degree in sports health science. Mr. Sibaja is also assisting the Life soccer team and has been instrumental in spreading the word about chiropractic throughout various departments of the government of Costa Rica.

Life Foundation, Inc., an educational, research and service corporation, has also been active in Costa Rica since 1993.

We supported the Costa Rican athletes in training at Life University's campus during the pre-Olympic years (1993-1994). The Costa Rican athletes received regular chiropractic care under the supervision and with the full approval of the Costa Rican Olympic Committee president and the head of the medical delegation. That was well publicized by the Costa Rican government through the participation of their diplomatic mission in

Atlanta, as the consul general visited the Life campus several times.

Pleased with and fully aware of the chiropractic benefits to athletic performance, the Costa Rica Olympic Committee asked Life University to appoint a doctor of chiropractic to their Olympic team during the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996. Dr. John Downes of Life University had the honor of serving Costa Rica in this capacity.

In 1996, the Costa Rica Olympic Committee asked Life University and the Life Foundation to establish a permanent clinic for their athletes in San Jose; an agreement to that effect was signed in August 1996. According to the agreement Life University and the Life Foundation provided comprehensive chiropractic care to the Costa Rican athletes in Honduras in 1997 and in Venezuela in 1998, with several newspaper and TV stations covering our participation.

Life University and the Life Foundation are assigned to provide care at the Pan American Games in Canada in August 1999 and in the Olympics in Sydney, Australia in the year 2000.

Mike Spino, Life's director of international sports, has been appointed as the head Olympic coach for the Costa Rican track and field team.

Life University has extended three additional chiropractic scholarships to Costa Rican nationals: Ms. Zoila Rosa Stewart, a nationally renowned Costa Rican Olympian; Mr. Pablo Nassar, who was nominated by the Olympic Committee; and Miss Alejandra Rodriguez Perez. All are currently enrolled in the chiropractic program at Life University.

Life University has also had a considerable amount of contact with the government of Costa Rica. Our activities with the government started in 1991, when my office worked closely with the consul general of Costa Rica in Atlanta. On several occasions the consul general visited Life's campus and met with Dr. Williams.

We visited Costa Rica numerous times in preparation for initiating interest from the government to look into legalizing the practice of chiropractic in that country. To that end, Life hired a law firm in San Jose headed by Mr. Bernal Aragon Barquero, a prominent attorney to introduce chiropractic legislation into the Costa Rica legal system.

Dr. Sid Williams, our founder and president, headed a delegation to Costa Rica in 1996, where we held a chiropractic symposium to introduce chiropractic to the health care providers in the country. During this visit, Drs. Sid and Nell Williams were appointed by the mayor of Marietta, Georgia to meet with and renew the ties between Marietta and its sister city of Hairidia. Drs. Sid and Nell were also invited to the presidential palace. They met the past president, Jose Maria Figueres Olsen, and discussed with him the future of chiropractic in Costa Rica. Since that time, Life has been working closely with several Costa Rican government officials and politicians to support the introduction of chiropractic legislation into Costa Rican law.

Drs. Sid and Nell Williams traveled to San Jose again in 1998. They met with the local chiropractic group and coordinated the introduction of chiropractic law to the government. The current president of Costa Rica, Miguel Angel Rodriguez and his wife, Lenora, visited Life University in late 1998 where they met with Drs. Sid and Nell Williams and toured the campus. As a result of this visit, the minister of health of Costa Rica, Dr. Pardo Regalia, headed an investigative delegation which included Dr. Chevaz. They had a very thorough investigative visit during which they met with several Life administrators, faculty members and students, and built their impression in preparation to reporting to the Costa Rican congress relative to passing the chiropractic legislation.

Life University built a 4,500 square-foot chiropractic clinic in San Jose within the headquarters of the Olympic Committee of Costa Rica. The clinic is a state-of-the-art chiropractic facility which will serve the athletes and, after acquiring the government's legal permission, also the general public.

As you can appreciate, Life University and its affiliated organizations have been extremely active and influential in introducing chiropractic into Costa Rica. Dr. Dill is a relative newcomer to Costa Rica. In 1995, I personally provided Dr. Dill with guidance on how to start a chiropractic organization in that country. I visited him in San Jose and assigned our liaison in Costa Rica, Miguel Hastings, to assist him in coordinating his activities.

#### *Reference*

1. Costa Rican Legislative Commission Votes Unanimously in Favor of Chiropractic Law. Important Step toward Chiropractic Legislation. Andrew Roberts,DC. *DC*, May 3, 1999, Vol 17, #10.

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