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There is More to Health Care Than Medicine

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Recent studies by the American Medical Association have found that for the first time ever, physician income is decreasing, patient visits per doctor are down, and more MDs than ever are dissatisfied with their own practices and profession. The failures and foibles of medicine are being brought to light more and more despite the efforts of the medical community to cover them up. The overuse of drugs and surgery (and the risks of both) have eroded the "doctor" image to an all-time low. News of the faltering medical system is widespread to the point that the surgeon general recently admitted, "The health care system in America is broken."

To a marketing professional, this represents an incredibly obvious opportunity for the chiropractic profession. The opportunity does not lie in defining who we are, but in the use of marketing technique known as repositioning the competition.

For years, groups of chiropractors have set out on their own to solve the ills of our profession. Many have tried to pen the quintessential definition of chiropractic in order to correctly position us in the minds of Americans and thereby secure a greater share of the health market. Although a noble ambition, this "let's figure out who we are" approach has had little, if any, effect on the expansion of chiropractic. In the 1980's, the number of chiropractors doubled, yet the percentage of Americans who use chiropractors did not significantly increase. Twice as many doctors are now trying to share the same size piece of the "patient pie" and many have felt the squeeze. In the 1990's, the number of chiropractors will again double. We can no longer continue to compete with each other for the same patients and expect to prosper. An effective strategy which expands our profession into new frontiers of the health care market is needed. The solution, as we see it, is to jump on the bandwagon of public sentiment and reposition the doctor who uses medicine.

Positioning is a powerful advertising tool, and is described in the best-selling book, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. In that book, the concept of repositioning is also discussed: "For a repositioning strategy to

work, you must say something about your competitor's product that causes the prospect to change his or her mind, not about your product, but about the competitor's product." Once the old idea has been changed, selling the new product of service is easy, because "---people will often search for a new idea to fill the void." Proctor & Gamble used two words to reposition Listerine, the king of halitosis hill -- "Medicine Breath." Once people changed how they felt about Listerine, it was easy to sell them the minty fresh taste of Proctor & Gamble's product -- Scope.

In 1979, Doctors Network, a chiropractic marketing firm, conducted a survey and found that when 79% of the population said "doctor" they meant "MD." How many times have we heard the term "regular doctor" from a friend or patient when they were speaking of their MD? This may seem like a subtle point, but subtle points are often written in stone in the mind of a prospect and can become a stone wall when it comes to receiving your message. In the minds of Americans, the MD maintains a position as king-of-the-hill in health care, a "real doctor," and one who knows everything about health. However, even though his license may give him carte blanche, his scope of practice is pretty well limited to drugs and surgery. Many in the medical profession simply prescribe drugs no matter what is wrong with the patient. David Viscott, M.D., addressed this issue on his popular radio program when he said, "This is what's wrong with medicine, folks. They give people drugs for a condition they have not even investigated." People need to know that there is more to health care than medicine.

Misunderstanding the limits of the doctor of medicine is not really the fault of the American consumer. The MD has successfully positioned himself as the authority in health care for quite some time. That position is now being questioned, and we can help to change public opinion. We should tell our patients and prospective patients why the doctor of medicine is so quick to prescribe medicine. "After all, Mrs. Jones, your medical doctor gave you drugs because that is what he knows. He was trained in the use of medicine. That is why he is called a doctor of medicine. I am a doctor of chiropractic. I don't treat with medicine." Patients' eyes light up when they realize that a medical doctor is simply one type of doctor, that he may not know everything, and that there really is more to health care than medicine.

When 7-Up began their famous Un-Cola campaign they repositioned the king of the soft drink hill to a position that was more realistic -- as king of the Cola hill. The Un-Cola was effectively telling America that there was more to soft drinks than cola. 7-Up sales skyrocketed.

Today the word medicine means health care and it should mean medicine. MD means doctor and it should mean doctor of medicine. Medical office means doctor's office and it should mean the place one goes to get medicine. Wouldn't it be great if our prospective patients understood that? So let's tell them. Once the public begins to realize the limitations of their medical doctors, we will finally have a real opportunity to tell them about chiropractic -- and they will listen.

We can continue to try to define chiropractic until the cows come home, but the 1980's have already proven the tactic to be a waste of time. The battle just moves from state to state, school to school, and journal to journal with no real progress. We have always had a great service to provide, even though no one has been able to author a definition of chiropractic. Perhaps no one should. As Richard Bach wrote in his book, *Illusions*, "Argue for your limitations and sure enough they're yours." Our limitations are not the issue in the minds of consumers. They are more concerned about the limitations of the other kind of doctors. Just as "medicine breath" produced millions of new Scope customers, our "medicine cabinet" approach will put patients in our offices as they realize that there is more to health care than medicine.

The doctor of medicine has a place in the health care system. It is not, however, on top of Mt. Olympus. His is a specialty that is very vital for certain conditions, although unnecessary (even dangerous) for other conditions. We are not suggesting that the repositioning tactic be to criticize or degrade his legitimate scope of practice with the use of such terms as "medicine man" or other derogatory phrases. As a fellow doctor, his place should be respected (but properly understood) and a more realistic understanding for medicine and medical is the first step.



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