

Is Our National Chiropractic Infrastructure Strong Enough for Tomorrow's Challenges?

A Call for Professional Unity

By Gene G. Veno

These days, just about every chiropractic publication is featuring articles on unity. Everyone professes to want unity - or do they just say and write that they want unity without being committed to it? Who could be against unity and still maintain credibility? Just as everyone "wants to go to Heaven, but no one wants to go now," the same forces are now in play with unity of the profession. We have COCSA again trying to broker national unity. History has shown that COCSA attempted to force unity in the past without success. We still have two national organizations, and other groups with national-sounding names have formed, but in the end, the status quo of our national associations has not changed. We still have more than one.



The chiropractic profession is truly comprised of a diverse group of dedicated professionals, but in general, they all want the same thing for the profession and its future survival. Why am I, a non-DC, writing about unity for the chiropractic profession? Part of the reason is that I have been affiliated with chiropractic for many years and serve as the executive vice president of the Pennsylvania Chiropractic Association. I was involved in the process of merger between disparate groups of DCs in my home state of Pennsylvania in the early '90s.

As a lobbyist for the chiropractic profession, I've seen firsthand how easy it can be to dismiss any legislative effort with little or no repercussions to the legislator. All they really needed to say is, "When you get the profession working together, come back and see me." Because of the lack of unity, legislation never

was considered plausible during the years of association infighting. When I served as lobbyist for the Pennsylvania Chiropractic Society, the legislators would just smile at me and give me the standard line, "Come back when you get together."

That phrase resonated in my head until the simple logic made so much sense that to do anything other than "get together" seemed implausible. In the mid-'90s, I represented all four organized chiropractic groups in Pennsylvania for a period of two years. I served as their government affairs representative, better known as their lobbyist. During this period of a voluntary truce, two important laws were enacted that even today are heralded as major successes for the health care industry in Pennsylvania: an auto reform bill (1991) and a workers' compensation law (1994). And yes, doctors of chiropractic were equally included in both pieces of legislation. This only happened because the chiropractic profession spoke as one voice during that critical period of reform.

In Pennsylvania, we did get together in 1996, and our efforts to advance the profession certainly have been productive. Chiropractors in our neighboring state of New Jersey were equally dysfunctional and recognized that unless they did something about speaking with one voice, they would remain not only powerless, but also vulnerable to any force dedicated to thwarting any advancement efforts for the profession. I was indeed impressed by the sincerity of the effort made in New Jersey. Feuding camps of chiropractors who for years had not spoken were having dinner together and recognizing that their differences were small in comparison to the huge similarities, goals and dreams they all shared. This reorganization could not have happened at a better time in New Jersey, where they are now facing scope-of-practice challenges. In all probability, New Jersey chiropractors will prevail - because they are united.

Other states you have been reading about lately, e.g., Colorado and Michigan, provide further demonstrable proof of state association leaders who have come to the realization that "united we stand divided" is a plan for failure. Legislative impotence is the inevitable outcome of multiple groups claiming to represent the same profession, succeeding only in stopping the other group's initiative from achieving victory. Connecticut, New York and Virginia, all state associations that I have visited to share the story on what unity can do, appear to be coming to that tipping point of taking the necessary action!

So, why do I write now about this issue, which has been a topic of interest for decades? Many other articles have suggested the low membership numbers of the national associations are due to the fact that doctors who may want to join the ACA or ICA do not do so because of a host of reasons (which are not relevant to

this article). The prevailing logic is to *force* merger so doctors in the field who want to join will then join, the association will be one happy group and the chiropractic profession will advance - all due to a forced merger.

Obviously, I am in support of merger and personally have been a party to enabling unity to be achieved, so my suggestions in this article are in no way meant to imply that unity is not a good thing. However, forced unity will not achieve the desired objectives of cooperation, harmony, improved efficiency and singular recognition. Every day, newspapers across the country report on how failed efforts in corporate America result in forced mergers or hostile takeovers. Ultimately, the corporation sells off or disassociates itself from the group it acquired in a forced merger, simply because it is a model that does not work. We do not have that luxury in chiropractic, and we do not have the resources, time or credibility to withstand a huge mistake.

Now I want you to imagine the impact we would achieve if, in response to this article, 20,000 readers each sent in a check for \$500? For the sake of discussion, let's also imagine we were going to form a new national association. I can hear it already: *Oh no, Gene Veno is suggesting another national association.* Hold on, hold on - nothing could be further from the truth. I said let's imagine we were going to form a new association; and let's assume the national annual dues were set at \$500; and let's assume any new association would be ineffective unless it truly represented at least half of the profession. Fifty percent of roughly 60,000 is 30,000. The ACA and the ICA combined have approximately 10,000 full-dues-paying members or approximately 17 percent of the profession. So, my question to you is simply this: Are 20,000 doctors of chiropractic each willing to put their check where their mouth is and commit to my challenge, which is to say *yes* to unity on a national level?

My original article title was, "Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is." The intent was to simply throw down the gauntlet and end this unity debate once and for all. Here is what I am proposing: Send me a check for \$500 payable to **The New National Association**. You have 120 days from the date this article is published to send your check, credit card number or pledge. If we get 20,000 doctors of chiropractic committing to this challenge, we will simply sit down with both the ACA and ICA and let them know that if they merge voluntarily, these 20,000 doctors - and by the way, \$10 million in cash - will be immediately recommended to join the new ACA-ICA Unified National Association! Now that is bargaining power at its finest. Imagine the dilemma of the national associations, knowing how many nonmembers are willing to do what is necessary to join; but only if merger is achieved. The dollars and the numbers will once and for all

determine *who speaks for chiropractic*.

If there truly is interest, unity will happen; if there is no interest, the time, effort and energy invested by many individuals attempting to negotiate a merger should be redirected to more productive uses and the considerable journal space devoted to the vitriolic editorials could be again better used to help solve a solvable problem.

In politics, the voters vote at the ballot box, or as they say in retail, "vote with their feet" - meaning that rather than participate or purchase, they walk away. With the growing threat to chiropractic and its very survival by competition heretofore never experienced by the profession, the debate on national health insurance, coupled with a declining market share, chiropractic and chiropractors have little time for empty rhetorical nonsense, limited strength to accomplish Herculean efforts, and insufficient money to battle each other's dysfunctional organization.

This plan is really simple. If we do not reach the 20,000 mark within 120 days, I will personally fund the postage to return each and every check to each and every doctor who sent in their commitment. This is my way of helping to either end this debate or accelerate it to a point at which chiropractic unity will be a meaningful reality as we enter the 2008 health care political debate.

Are you in or out? This will cost you far less than it does me. It will cost you the price of a postage stamp! Is your profession worth that? Even the possibility that only a few individuals care enough to take up the challenge will at least end the speculative and hypothetical debate about the number of doctors who would, could, should, might or will join a new merged national association. We will now once and for all know if there really is any interest in this obsession with merger and unity - or is this discussion simply reinforcing the definition of insanity: doing the same things over and expecting a different result? How long must the chiropractic profession suffer under the albatross of a dis-united national organization?

Like it or not, even from my vantage point as a non-chiropractor, these are critical times for the chiropractic profession. The political winds are changing and the health care debate cannot continue without chiropractic having a seat at the table. One thing I am certain of is that chiropractic will not have a seat or voice under the current circumstances.

The decision is ultimately yours. However, I find it difficult to imagine that the cost of a postage stamp and the assurance that your check - your investment in tomorrow - will be returned if this unity effort fails,

should certainly motivate you and your colleagues to at least participate in this first-ever symbolic gesture of unity. If you are uncertain, call a colleague and ask if they are going to participate. Find out their reason why the profession should not be united. Maybe this discussion, one to one, colleague to colleague, will result in *action*.

I will personally commit my time, effort and energy to coordinating this effort, and I am willing to make this commitment to you as an executive director who has seen the benefits of unity and understands the consequences of apathy.

So, my friends, the decision is really up to each one of you. If you individually do nothing, nothing will ever get done. You can complain and gripe all you want, but unless you take an action step, you will remain in exactly the same situation you are in now. That situation is crystal clear: A majority of the profession does not belong to either national association.

This is an opportunity to send a clear, compelling and concise message to both national groups. This is an opportunity that will only take a check and a stamp. If this fails, you will not lose your money, but you may lose something much more important: the possibility of a strong, unified national organization. I have taken the time to think this out to determine if the rank and file really wants a unified nation of chiropractors. You know all the issues and challenges facing chiropractic.

The real question is this: Do you really want to do anything to bring about a unified Chiropractic Nation? That decision is only a check and a postage stamp away from becoming reality! If the response is not overwhelming, then you cannot ever complain that the American Chiropractic Association and the International Chiropractic Association are not doing what you want them to do. We can only be heard and will only be listened to if we have a majority of the profession.

Will You Join the Call for National Unity?

Send your check, as well as your e-mail address so we can keep you personally updated on this unity effort over the next few months. PNC Bank will be the repository of your checks and will keep records. The safety and security of the program is without precedent. It is a failsafe program, either way. If enough contribute, you win and a new strong organization will form. If there are not enough contributions, you win because you do not lose your contribution. How can you lose?

Please send your contribution, payable to The New National Association, to:

National Campaign for Chiropractic Unity

Attention: Gene G. Veno

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