



WCCS

World Congress of Chiropractic Students

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Philosophy: To be, or not to be?

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Abstract: All students of chiropractic acquire knowledge surrounding specific philosophies. Practitioners try and assist students by placing importance on 'this' or 'that' form of chiropractic philosophy.

The WCCS welcomes all philosophies in the belief that by understanding each other and working together, we can achieve more for the growth of chiropractic than by taking dogmatic opposing positions.

We value this fellowship based around our common education and learning.

Indexing Terms: Chiropractic; World Congress of Chiropractic Students, WCCS, philosophy.

Exposition

I recently attended a regional organisation meeting with many qualified Chiropractors. One of the more experienced Chiropractors made a passing comment about how younger and newly qualified graduates struggle with adjustments. He went on to state that we should be more than proficient in adjusting (as this is what we are supposed to be doing) 'subluxations', but that we spend more time performing dry needling and other electro-modality procedures than doing what chiropractors were intended. Furthermore he emphasised how *'yes these procedures can assist in treatment'*, but ultimately it is *'the adjustment'* that should be first and foremost.

As a student who will graduate within the next year, I spent the next few days pondering this comment. This led me to the thought of the origin of chiropractic and the ideas surrounding the ever-debated topic of chiropractic philosophy. Does it still have a place in evidenced-based practice (EBP)? Are we as a profession not being true to who we are? How does one even go about practicing within the EBP realm, while still paying homage to the origins of our profession?

For countless years, the philosophy of chiropractic has been one of the most fiercely debated topics within our profession. The debate which pins the *'straight'* vs *'mixer'* ideologies against each other has arguably caused more division than harmony. (Biggs L Fau et al)

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However it is an important conversation that one needs to have. The two spheres of philosophy can be broken down into those that focus on the '*subluxation*' and those that do not. Subluxation translated literally means '*less than a dislocation*' and in the philosophy its scope encompasses the ideology that this subluxation is the root of '*dis-ease*' in the body.

DD Palmer identified a relationship between '*functional skeletal abnormality*' and the prospective negative effects that it has on the nervous system. The body is seen as having innate intelligence and being a self-healing entity and the chiropractor is seen as being a facilitator in this process. This ideology has been present since the birth of chiropractic with DD Palmer and has been the foundation of many school's education programmes and the way that many practice. (Redwood and Cleveland, 2003)

This school of thought and those that follow it has been colloquially termed '*straight*' chiropractic, also known as vitalism. '*Mixer's*' are then the opposite of straights, they are seen as the '*healers*' and believe that the state of the vertebral column and spine does not determine the full health of an individual. Modalities other than just the adjustment are also utilised. As one can see these, two main philosophies widely differ from one-another and there should be no surprise as to why the philosophy of chiropractic is still such a contentious topic.

The emergence of evidence based practice was seen as early as the 1930's in the United States of America. (Keating, Cleveland and Menke, 2004) This was seen in the change of education curriculums as programmes began to include grounding in basic sciences, physiology and anatomy. As the years passed, in order for chiropractic to gain more credibility within the medical fraternity, evidence-based practice guidelines were developed.

Due to the subluxation complex having '*no formal scientific backing*', this move was imperative to begin the process of being accepted in mainstream medicine circles and not to be seen as '*quacks*'. This no doubt caused contention as many believed that the fundamental philosophy of the profession was being sold down the river. To prove chiropractic works to people who do not understand the premise of the body being a self-healing entity. McAndrews speaks to this in particular pertaining to chiropractic research, in his 2012 paper where he states '*We know chiropractic works; we just have to get more people to understand our philosophy.*' (McAndrews 2012)

The age old question still exists; how do we as new graduates proceed? How do we wade through the seemingly tumultuous waters of our chiropractic philosophical past? How do we merge the WFC's '*BE EPIC*' principles while still remembering the origins of our profession? Can we merge the two ideologies or will be forever opposed, never to mix like oil and water?

I believe that it's not that black or white. This matter is more of a grey area. One's education largely determines the philosophical train of thought and as such largely the way one will practice. It is the duty of an individual to educate and interact with as much of this profession as possible to breakdown the thought patterns and barriers that divide us. We all have one aim and that is to get our patients feeling their best holistically. The age-old saying of '*ignorance breeds contempt*' is definitely true in this essence.

We need to take off our tunnel vision blinkers and interact with each-other in an open-minded environment to learn from each other. WCCS provides the perfect opportunity for this. Learning from early on in your chiropractic career that all schools of ideology can come together and function cohesively.

In conclusion, the future of our unique profession rests physically in the hands of us, the newly and almost graduated. Instead of us asking which philosophy we '*follow*', let us leave the '*old*' ideologies, fighting and tunnel vision mentality in the past. Let us form a new ideology of unity and an open environment for life-long learning to take Chiropractic further.

Ultimately it is only through education and learning that we will be able to unify as one.

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Note

All contributions from the WCCS are gathered at apcj.net/WCCS