

# Chiropractic Update



## Update 93

### How far can Complementary and Alternative Medicine go? The case of Chiropractic and Homeopathy

This paper, by researchers from the Institute for Human Development Toronto, University of Toronto, Canada, examines the efforts of two complementary and alternative occupations, chiropractors and homeopaths, to move from the margins to the mainstream in health care in the province of Ontario.

The authors use a variety of theoretical perspectives to understand how health occupations professionalize: the trait functionalist framework, social closure, the system of professions, and the concept of countervailing powers. The research traces the strategies that the leaders of the two groups are employing, as well as the resources they are able to marshal. These are analyzed within the context of the larger institutional and cultural environment. The data are derived from in-person interviews with 16 leaders (10 chiropractic and 6 homeopathic) identified through professional associations, teaching institutions and informants from the groups. The responses were analyzed with qualitative content analysis. We also used archival materials to document what the leaders were telling us.

#### The data revealed four main strategies:

- (1) improving the quality of educational programs,
- (2) elevating standards of practice,
- (3) developing more peer reviewed research, and
- (4) increasing group cohesion.

Although both groups identified similar strategies, the chiropractors were bolstered by more resources as well as state sanctioned regulation. The efforts of the homeopaths were constrained by scarce resources and the absence of self-regulation. In both cases the lack of strong structural support from government and the established health professions played an important role in limiting what was possible.

The authors conclude,

“In the future, it may be to the state’s advantage to modify the overall shape of health care to include alternative paradigms of healing along with conventional medical care. Such a shift would put complementary and alternative medicine occupations in a better position to advance professionally and become formal elements of the established health care system”.

#### Reference:

Kelner M, Wellman B, Welsh S, Boon H. [How far can complementary and alternative medicine go? The case of chiropractic and homeopathy.](#) Soc Sci Med 2006 Aug 19; [Epub ahead of print]