

Why Vertebral Subluxation?

This article appeared in the August 2008 edition of *The Australian Chiropractor*



In October 2006, I listened to Dr Guy Reikeman present at the CAA National Conference in Brisbane. One of his major themes was leadership. He outlined why he believes it to be a necessity for us to become very effective leaders, both personally and as a profession. It was a very powerful presentation, especially for me as the newly elected President of the Australian Spinal Research Foundation.

Leadership is first and foremost about knowing one's self, declaring one's self, and then bringing that self fully to the arena of life. It appears quite evident to me that the most successful leaders amongst us have a very clear understanding of their own identity and what they stand for. Their clarity of purpose and fearlessness in expressing that purpose is universal. This is a journey for all of us to make, if we so choose.

Our professional identity, rather than being crystal clear, has historically been divided between two camps. This has undoubtedly hindered our pathway towards leadership, and there seems to be quite a gap between what we believe ourselves to be, and what the public perceives us to be.

It is not the Foundation's role to define chiropractic in the public domain. It certainly is our role to know and declare ourselves within our profession. Over the last few years we have been actively and purposefully doing that, in order to give a very clear, unambiguous, and upfront picture of who we are, what we do and what we stand for. This endeavour is now crystallized most succinctly in our vision and mission statements, and in our research culture statement.

Reading those statements, it is clear that our focus is on research which investigates and involves the vertebral subluxation. Many in our profession are quite comfortable with this focus, and indeed have expressed their support for it. Some others have expressed concern about our focus being too narrow.

The question, therefore, is put as to why have our focus squarely on the VS?

At a basic level, it is without question that for the last 110 years chiropractors have been analyzing 'something' in the human spine, and subsequently making some form of 'input' into the spine, in order

to effect a positive change in a person's state of being. There have been many conceptual models created in order to facilitate that analysis and input. Most of these, if not all, have resulted primarily from observation in practice by individuals who may or may not have been geniuses. Their models have not been borne out of rigorous scientific investigation, by today's standards. This is an observation rather than a criticism. Indeed the *Art* will conceivably always be ahead of the *Science*.

These extraordinary individuals (Gonstead, Thompson, DeJarnette, Goodheart, Fuhr etc) have certainly left their mark. Every chiropractor in practice must use some sort of conceptual framework in order to make an analysis and an input, and many utilise the frameworks conceived by these pioneers. To make the observation that these models, while being utilized in practice, require scientific investigation, is important for a maturing profession.

Not all chiropractors term that 'something' in the spine subluxation. However there is considerable evidence that practicing chiropractors hold vertebral subluxation as an important aspect of how they practice (1), how they believe the public should perceive chiropractic (2) and as having high priority for research (3). The Association of Chiropractic Colleges Paradigm of Chiropractic(4), agreed by all North American college presidents in 1996 and now endorsed by the American Chiropractic Association, the International Chiropractors' Association and the World Federation of Chiropractic states, in part, that "*Chiropractic is concerned with the preservation and restoration of health, and focuses particular attention on the subluxation*".

So in terms of investigating what we do, where else would you possibly have the focus, other than on the 'something' in the spine which has been called subluxation by the majority of chiropractors for 100 years?

For me, the reasoning goes somewhat deeper than that. Chiropractic has a unique gift to give to the world. That gift is the paradigm from which it operates, which encompasses health coming from within, respect for nature, trust in innate intelligence, a proactive approach to removing

interference to that innate intelligence, a striving to be one's best, and personal responsibility for one's own health.

Lately, in my practice, we have been reworking our vision and mission statements. One part of our vision is *"a world where everybody has the opportunity to fully understand the chiropractic paradigm, and make their choices, health and otherwise, with that knowledge"*. This is important to me and I know to most of my friends in chiropractic. We don't believe the welfare of the world is being served by having such a strong focus on the predominantly reactive, crisis-care, disease-treatment paradigm which pervades our world at present.

Our vision statement arises through a sincere belief that a widely understood and utilised model of health care aimed at removing interference to a natural expression of health, rather than being aimed at treating disease, is capable of radically changing the world.

The researching of spinal manipulation for the treatment of conditions is something that can and is being done by other professions. These professions would happily take over that role from us, if indeed that was our role, and they seem to have access to resources to which we unfortunately don't. To spend our time, effort and resources on such a pursuit is certainly wasteful and possibly self-defeating. By focusing our research effort on our point of difference - the adjustment of subluxations for improved neurophysiology leading to enhanced health and performance - will not only help us to understand better and validly inform what we do, but also help us, in time, bring our unique paradigm to the world.

To pursue research within our paradigm is perhaps more difficult than researching in the condition-treatment model. There is less precedent. It requires the creation of different models. It requires extraordinary researchers. It requires research questions arising out of the paradigm. It requires funding from within our profession. These challenges must not deter us from becoming the leaders our world needs us to be.

1. Keating J, Charlton K, Grod J, Perle S, Sikorski D, Winterstein J (2005) Subluxation: dogma or science? *Chiropratic & Osteopathy* 13: p.17.
2. WFC Consultation on the Identity of the Chiropractic Profession
<http://www.wfc.org/website/WFC/Website.nsf/WebPage/IdentityConsultation?OpenDocument&ppos=2&spos=5&rsn=y> (accessed 25/4/08).
3. Jansen RD, Meeker WC, Rosner A. (1997) American chiropractors' research priorities. *JNMS: The Journal of the Neuromusculoskeletal System* 5(4): p.144-149.
4. The Association of Chiropractic Colleges' Paradigm of Chiropractic http://www.chirocolleges.org/paradigm_scopet.html.

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