Where we have come from and the road ahead: Presentation at the Tenth Biennial Congress of the World Federation of Chiropractic, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 2009

Gerard W. Clum DC*

President, Life Chiropractic College West, Hayward, CA

Immediate Past President, World Federation of Chiropractic, Hayward, CA

Received 29 October 2009; revised 1 November 2009; accepted 3 November 2009

Key indexing terms:

Chiropractic, history

Abstract This article represents the closing plenary speech from the Tenth Biennial Congress of the World Federation of Chiropractic held in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, in 2009.
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On behalf of the organizers of this congress, the Foundation for Chiropractic Education and Research (FCER), the Canadian Chiropractic Association (CCA), and the World Federation of Chiropractic (WFC), I wish to express our thanks and appreciation for your participation at this seminal gathering in the history of the profession in Canada and in the history of the WFC. I would also like to express the gratitude of everyone associated with FCER, the CCA, and the WFC for the participation of the presenters, sponsors, and vendors that has made this event what it has been.

From the perspective of the WFC, the completion of this tenth world congress is a milestone in our organizational history. From our earliest efforts in Toronto in 1991 (Auerbach), on to London in 1993 (Diem), Washington, D.C., in 1995 (Sweaney), Tokyo in 1997 (Sweaney), Auckland in 1999 (Sportelli), Paris in 2001 (Vaughan), Orlando in 2003 (Carey), Sydney

in 2005 (Metcalf), Vilamoura in 2007 (Clum), and now Montreal in 2009 (Papadopoulos),¹ the chiropractic world has come to look to this event as the preeminent gathering of researchers, leaders, and practitioners anywhere on the planet.

Since the organization of the WFC in 1988,² many persons have served in its executive offices, even more on the council and yet more in the assembly of the WFC. Throughout our history and throughout the history of this congress, there have been two constants, Mr. David Chapman Smith as secretary general of the WFC and Dr. Scott Haldemann as the chair of the WFC's Research Council. It is to these two gentlemen in particular that the profession around the world owes a debt of gratitude. The efforts of all others aside, without them we would not be gathered here today.

Further from the perspective of the WFC, we celebrate over 20 years of growth, of accomplishment, of increases in reputation, and of significance in the profession and beyond. From this vantage point, addressing where we have come from is an exciting assignment. As to the road ahead, perhaps we should

* Life Chiropractic College West, 25001 Industrial Boulevard, Hayward, CA 94545. Tel.: +1 510 780 4500; fax: +1 510 780 4515.
E-mail address: gclum@lifewest.edu.

take a cue from the philosophic tradition of American Pragmatism and respond, "If it isn't broken, don't fix it!" The WFC is one of the shining stars of the profession in terms of its efficiency, effectiveness, fairness, and collegiality. It is a model of what can be done by people of like mind in the presence of professional tolerance and good faith. For the Federation, it is time to stay the course, to continue the traditions of academic, clinical, diplomatic, and political excellence that have been the hallmark of the WFC. The challenge of the next decade for the Federation will be succession. This period will require considerable resources and great thought while we focus on our traditions, policies, and practices to ensure that the lineage of accomplishment that the WFC represents will be continued unbroken.

Our more senior practitioners and our member associations, such as this congress' cosponsor, the Canadian Chiropractic Association, emerged in an era that was characterized by a spirit of rugged individualism and an ethic of personal determinism. We exist because we were rebellious, because we rejected the status quo, and because we had the temerity and the tenacity to pursue a different approach to the ills of humankind. Our history is characterized by bigger-than-life individuals who enabled us to be here today. Leaders who were dogged in their determination, single-minded in their purpose, unwavering in their commitment, and relentless in the pursuit of what each saw as the best interests of the profession and the people we have the privilege to serve. Names like Palmer, Cleveland, Logan, Janse, Napolitano, Gillet, Bolton, Parker, and Williams evoke instant recognition by this profession on a first-name basis or just by their initials alone.

They provided us a conceptual and professional footing and framework to develop, expand, and grow. The fullness of time will tell the tale of how well this generation has done its job with the tasks it was given. Our time has been marked by legislation, litigation, and literacy with emergence of a literature base from which to launch the next generation. This generation learned that the right to practice over an adjusting table could only be guaranteed by diligence at the conference table.

Regardless of the accounting, we know for a fact that the mandate to the next generation is not what our forebearers experienced, and to a large extent it is not what we have experienced. The road ahead for the profession is exactly as Robert Frost penned it in 1920:

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both*

*And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, just as fair,
And having perhaps better the claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence;
Two roads diverged in a wood, And I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference*

The call to those that travel the road ahead will be to traverse the unpaved yet promise-filled path of integration while persisting against assimilation. Delivery of health care services and the funding of the efforts of all those that seek to ease human suffering and enhance human performance in the early 21st century is in fact the road less traveled. The growing whisper of the chiropractors' call to respect the body's ability to heal and the complex and magnificent integration of form and function must be heard. It must rise to a faint cry and then be nurtured on to a plaintive call to ultimately be converted into a stunning roar as we move down that path.

Gevitz,³ the great historian of osteopathy, warned his profession and prophetically ours as to the nature of the challenges before us. He told us of the phases of movements in human endeavor where ideas come forth to fill a need in time, where those ideas are modified and tempered for acceptance and where those ideas, as a consequence of modification, no longer fill a compelling need and cease to have reason to exist.

We must continue our movement down the path of integration while we protect the core reality and value of the proposition we seek to integrate. It is not a practice, a skill, or a procedure we seek to have respected. It is a thought, it is a concept, and it is a promise. Integration of our thoughts and practices must involve academics, research, clinical practice, administration, and politics. A sense of caution must follow in each and every venue. Caution cannot rise to the level of subverting the goal, but we cannot proceed appropriately without it either.

Your children, or perhaps your grandchildren, know the wisdom of the great philosopher Mufassa, as seen in the Disney animated film *The Lion King*, who at a critical moment in time returns to counsel his son, Simba, about what Simba must do. He offers one thought, the most compelling thought of all: “Remember who you are!”

Remember that heart-warming and heart rendering moment when you delivered an adjustment and you knew to the core of your being that your patient was better—in ways not fully understood and in ways not necessarily measurable, that joy-filled moment of certainty that answered the question of why you became a chiropractor.

To rephrase Robert Frost, “Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if *we* should ever come back.” As we approach our decision in our own yellow wood, a choice that appears reasonable and logical, we must remember who we are. We must remember our dream to bring forward a different approach, a different idea, and a different practice for the betterment of humankind. In our process of integration, will we inoculate them with our ideas or will we be subsumed into the machine of the greater world of health care and will the particle of light we bring to the discussion be lost?

“Two roads diverged in a wood, And I—I took the one less traveled by.” If that be the case, let us travel boldly, proudly, with respect for our history, our knowledge, our skill, and our vision of what chiropractic has to offer. If, and only if, we do so, we will be able to say with pride to the generations to follow, “And that has made all the difference.”

Funding sources and potential conflicts of interest

The author reports no funding sources or conflicts of interest for this study.

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