How Has the Chiropractic Profession Changed in the Past 20 Years? A State Association Perspective

By Janet Jordan

So much has happened in the past 20 years, it is hard to know where to begin. I understand other national groups are submitting their thoughts on this topic, and are undoubtedly reminiscing on where chiropractic was in 1984 compared to where it is today.

But I have a bit of a different perspective as the executive director of COCSA. I’d like to approach this from the aspect of how the environment has changed for chiropractic state associations, and the impact that has made on the profession.

I think the biggest impact for state associations has been technology. I’ve only been involved in chiropractic for 15 years, initially as the executive director of the South Carolina Chiropractic Association (SCCA), but I remember when SCCA got its first computer. What a blessing and a curse. Communications with members is now instantaneous, creating an ever-increasing need for state associations to be informed and able to respond at the drop of a hat. Anyone who has ever been involved in an association knows that the ability to make an instantaneous decision is contrary to the very culture of the associations of the ’80s. Successful associations have had to rethink their governance structures, because management by committee no longer works in a world of 24/7 news and information.

A second huge impact on state associations has been the entry into the chiropractic marketplace of "Generation Xers" and "Millennials." These generations of doctors are not motivated to association membership and volunteerism like members of the past. They have come into a profession that is readily accepted by the general public, and have not experienced the struggles of the pioneers who came before them. They are not motivated by the same hot buttons, but are more concerned with getting paid. Generational differences in a state association’s membership also make it increasingly difficult for associations to do things the same way for all members. Associations are having to customize their communications and activities in order to service the wants and needs of the different generations of members. Associations that have not adapted to these variances in their membership are finding they have fewer and fewer members to serve.
A third impact on state associations is basic economic factors. With the influx of managed care and the overall tightening of the health care dollar, doctors are making less money and having to comply with more rules and regulations. As a result, state association membership dues are losing out to the electric bill and the mortgage payment. At the same time, volunteerism has decreased and association costs have risen as associations acquire more specialized staff and technology to meet the ever-demanding needs and expectations of members in today’s society. Without retooling their programs and services, associations will continue to face dwindling revenues as online continuing education programs replace traditional seminars and conventions, and as members gravitate to the for-profit market that provides better services and responses to their needs. The Congress recognizes this as the next threat to the state association community and will continue to bring together the best and brightest minds in chiropractic and association management to brainstorm new ways of doing the same old thing - promoting and protecting the chiropractic profession.

Over the past 20 years, as other national associations have struggled, the Congress has grown, now representing 55 associations in 42 states. That’s a membership of 84% - not bad by any standards. The challenges faced by state associations over the years, and the continued strife between national chiropractic groups, are two of the primary reasons the Congress has grown into the organization it is today. State association leaders need a place where they can share, network and brainstorm with other leaders and not be hampered by the "he said, she said" chiropractic mentality that fills the headlines. By sharing ideas, good and bad, we learn from others’ successes and failures and create stronger associations. The Congress walks the talk of being nonpolitical (omnipoli-tical), and whatever project we undertake, we keep that mindset. This allows our members and the rest of the profession to see that if you have the same agenda and goals, you can work together. The Congress provides a niche for the chiropractic profession that, unfortunately, is not duplicated anywhere else. As Daniel Levinson once said, "No one person can accomplish much if they don’t work with others." Let’s hope it doesn’t take another 20 years for the rest of the profession to catch on.

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