
Editorial: Information and Informatics

Research and other forms of scholarly activity have been increasingly recognized as vital components of the effort to bring the chiropractic profession widespread recognition and public acceptance. Few chiropractors today would argue that such research is not important. Calls for more and better research are increasingly common, and there have been significant advances in the quality of clinical research within the profession. However, this is only part of the story. The creation of scholarly works is the beginning of the process. After the work has been created, it must be produced in a publicly available form so that the information becomes available to all who would seek to retrieve it. Additionally, for those in our profession who are engaged in clinical practice, there must be a desire to stay abreast of new information and the skills to find and critically evaluate that information. It is in these areas that I fear our profession is not faring well.

We have multiple venues for publication of scholarly work within the chiropractic profession, but at this time most are experiencing difficulties in surviving. The *Journal of Sports Chiropractic & Rehabilitation* suddenly ceased publication earlier this year as a result of financial insolvency, and *Topics in Clinical Chiropractic* will cease publication at the end of this year. Several others are currently facing significant financial difficulties, and may follow into extinction. Some have opted to face the financial challenge by ceasing to publish in paper, and have become on-line publications. While this does relieve some of the financial stress and does increase ease of access for many potential readers, it poses significant risk of “loss of history.” If in the future an electronic journal ceases operation, it disappears entirely, as the libraries of the world do not have paper copies.

Most scholarly literature in chiropractic is indexed, but not in a database that is freely available. Anyone in the world with access to the Internet can do a literature search on Medline at no cost, but very little chiropractic literature is accessible through this means. Use of the MANTIS database requires payment, providing a disincentive to use, even among the chiropractic community. If we want our body of literature to be widely accessed and used, we need to make it freely available.

Lastly, and of greatest importance to the educational community, is the issue of training our future clinical practitioners in the skills of informatics and critical appraisal. One of my colleagues recently told me that he had assigned a student to perform a literature search on a topic, and the student had returned with a statement that there was no available research literature on the topic. The student was asked for the basis for his conclusion and replied that “there were no hits on Yahoo.” Many of our students have read an abstract or two under duress, but have never read (much less critically evaluated) an actual research article.

I believe that these problems are related to each other and that for the progress of recent years in chiropractic research to continue to be meaningful, they will have to be addressed. If and when the majority of our profession acquires the

taste for consuming scholarly publications, and when access to the information in our body of literature becomes widely available, demand for the publications that contain new research will increase sufficiently to ensure viability. Until such cultural changes within chiropractic take place, our body of research will be effectively marginalized and therefore will have little or no impact.

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Editor