

Research – The Profession's Spine



Dr. Richard Gehrke, DC
President, Canadian Chiropractic Association

It is a great pleasure to have this opportunity as the newly elected President of the Canadian Chiropractic Association to address the audience of the JCCA. The Journal marked its 50th anniversary last year, a major accomplishment in this age of disposable sound bites and transient information. I believe the longevity and success of the JCCA is a tribute to the maturing of the profession and the commitment of the national Association to research-related activities. I also believe that the future of the pro-

fession will be increasingly reliant on a strong research presence within the health care milieu.

Why is research important? Perhaps the simplest answer is because research informs patient care and helps us to be better health care providers. As someone once said, "Knowledge is power." The more knowledgeable we become, the more effective we can be as clinicians. The ability to adapt and grow as new knowledge presents itself is a cornerstone of maturity and credibility in today's cash-strained health system. Increasingly payers, including the paying public, require evidence for therapies before they are willing to expend limited financial resources. The broader and deeper the research base for chiropractic care becomes, the greater the opportunities to divert appropriate care to the most qualified providers.

Research is also important because it builds relationships within government and its agencies, academic institutions, the research community, health benefit insurers, and other health disciplines. Relationships grow the familiarity, comfort and trust essential to being a full partner in the delivery of health care. The profession benefits. The health care system benefits. Most importantly, patients benefit from mutually respectful inter-disciplinary relationships.

As an advocacy group mandated to promote the profession, the CCA has a responsibility to support research and research-related activities. It's a responsibility we have taken to heart. The single largest CCA budget expenditure is on research because we believe a solid research program is essential to professional success. There should be no distinction between the public interest and the profession's interest if we want to continue to grow and expand our role in health care. Research is the bridge that aligns the public and professional interests.

How does the CCA help further the profession's research agenda? The answer is in many different ways, some obvious and some not so obvious. For example, the

JCCA is funded out of CCA revenues. The JCCA is the Canadian profession's stake in the ground in the world of peer-reviewed literature and was recently accorded the honour of being posted on the prestigious PubMed database.

CCA senior staff member, Dr. Allan Gotlib is the Editor of the JCCA and the Director of Research Programs at the Association. All of Dr. Gotlib's time is devoted to advancing our research portfolio. For example, Dr. Gotlib works with the CCA Research Committee which is appointed by the Board of Governors to provide direction and input into research initiatives. He is also the staff liaison to the Canadian Chiropractic Research Foundation (CCRF), which is charged with fundraising to support important programs such as the establishment of university-based chiropractic research chairs and professorship programs.

Thanks to the work of Dr. Gotlib, the Research Committee and funding from the CCA, we now have five university-based research chairs/professorships in place and talks are in progress with universities in three other provinces to establish chairs or professorships there. The CCA's financial relationship with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research is an example of the types of funding partnerships that enable the development of university research chair positions.

In addition to the funding provided by the CCA, the ten provincial chiropractic associations are firmly behind the research chair initiative both through joining the CCRF and fundraising for research chairs in their provinces.

Our DC-PhDs are on the front-lines of our growing research capacity and networking initiatives. There is no question that this investment in people will pay off in both the short and long terms.

The CCA's Research Bulletins and Research Symposia keep members up to date on activities and provide opportunities to share new knowledge and address emerging clinical issues.

The CCA also supports the profession's research culture in a variety of indirect ways. We are members of the United Nations Bone and Joint Decade (BJD) initiative and have a delegate on the Canadian BJD team. Similarly, we support the work of the Bone and Joint Decade

Task Force on Neck Pain which recently published its findings in the *Spine* journal, including the important stroke study in which Canadian DC researchers were co-investigators.

The pivotal work of the Neck Pain Task Force will inform the profession's Clinical Practice Guideline on Adult Neck Pain Not Associated with Whiplash. The clinical practice guideline initiative in collaboration with the Canadian Federation of Chiropractic Regulatory and Educational Accreditation Boards is a prime example of research in action. Clinical Practice Guidelines are based on the best available evidence and provide practical guidance to clinicians both to optimize outcomes and manage risks. The CPG program which is supported by nine provincial associations and their respective regulatory boards has proven its value on several important occasions where the safety and efficacy of chiropractic care has been called into question.

How to do even more continues to challenge us. Chiropractic is a relatively small profession and its members have been generous in contributing by being members of the CCA, the CCRF, the FRCQ in Quebec and by contributing to their provincial association initiatives. Without the support of the profession's individual members we would accomplish little. Money, of course, is the key and we continue to look for new and innovative sources of funding to further our goals. I am confident we will be successful.

As I look to the future, my ideal looks like this. A broad and varied set of clinical practice guidelines that are renewed on an ongoing basis to reflect the best available evidence. Chiropractic research chairs in every major university in the country. A strong contingent of chiropractic researchers and PhDs inhabiting the major institutions of the country. A vibrant program of original research that continues to shed light on what works, what doesn't, and why. Chiropractic participation in the significant interdisciplinary research symposia that touch on our scope of practice. And most importantly, a place as a valued and respected partner in a truly multi-disciplinary health care system focused on wellness – not just disease care.

Idealistic? Perhaps. But I believe that if we can imagine it, we can make it real.