

ICA President Finds Himself Defending Traditional Chiropractic in International Affairs

Interview with Stephen Welsh, DC



On April 29, 2019, the International Chiropractors Association (ICA) filed a formal complaint against two members of the World Federation of Chiropractic (WFC) Research Committee, Gregory Kawchuk and Jan Hartvigsen, asserting that they had violated the WFC principles of governance during the 2019 WFC Biennial Congress in Berlin.

The ICA contended that the world chiropractic stage provided by the WFC was being used to advance a divisive political agenda. This agenda demonstrated a level of intolerance and disrespect for traditional chiropractic practice that should not be acceptable in an organization that had been founded on principles of diversity and inclusiveness.

The whole conflict began with the publication of a paper co-authored by the previously mentioned research committee members in February 2019. This paper, now popularly referred to as the “Divorce Paper,”^[1] asserted that the WFC had signaled a policy shift by abandoning attempts at “unity,” and claimed that the practice of traditional chiropractic was not compatible with the self described “official” evidence-friendly chiropractic profession (this position was then promoted by Dr. Kawchuk from the Berlin WFC biennial stage).

The clash then escalated with the publication of a paper in that same online journal, “Chiropractic & Manual Therapy”, which openly criticized the ICA for publishing a white paper calling for more research into the relationship between chiropractic and the immune system. This positional statement by these WFC research council members, titled “A united statement of the global chiropractic research community against the pseudoscientific claim that chiropractic care boosts immunity,”^[2] directly criticized the ICA white paper position for suggesting that there is “an association between spinal manipulation and the autonomic nervous system” and that “these studies suggest mechanisms by which spinal influences may mediate a clinically significant impact on immune function.”

The “Divorce Paper,” was subsequently used as a reference in a complaint filed by eight national chiropractic associations seeking to have the ICA removed from participation at the WFC. These eight national associations

asserted that the ICA is damaging the reputation of the Chiropractic profession and that as evidence-based associations, they could not afford to be affiliated with an organization promoting these ‘dangerous and unproven claims.’

The American Chiropractor (TAC) caught up with the President of the ICA, Dr. Stephen Welsh (SW), to understand what is going on between these two important Associations.

TAC: How did the International Chiropractors Association begin working with the World Federation of Chiropractic? Can you tell our readers a little about the history of WFC?

SW: The ICA played a significant role in the creation of the WFC. In May 1987, ICA Board member Dr. Gary Auerbach attended the General Assembly of the WHO in Geneva with ICA Legal Advisor Mr. David Chapman-Smith. In their report to the ICA Board in June 1987, a recommendation was made to create a World Federation of National Chiropractic Organizations in order to gain NGO status at the WHO.

The World Federation of Chiropractic was established in Sydney, Australia on October 2, 1988, and at the first council meeting in September 1989, Dr. Gary Auerbach was elected its first President, and David Chapman-Smith became the Secretary-General. The WFC did gain NGO status in January 1997.

TAC: Can you give some insight on what is happening with the ICA and the WFC?

SW: Following the events in Berlin in March of 2019, it has become apparent that there are a group of academics and chiropractic researchers that have been promoting a flawed evidenced-based chiropractic paradigm



Drs. John Maltby, Claire Welsh, Stephen Welsh & Gerry Clum

that has at its core a rejection of D.D. Palmers basic foundational tenets. This group goes so far as to refer to the basic tenets of chiropractic as pseudoscience. These researchers have recently escalated their criticisms of the ICA and those criticisms have influenced several European Chiropractic Associations. These associations have filed a complaint. The ICA has always been a staunch supporter of the ideals and objectives of the WFC and continues to maintain that traditional chiropractic is evidenced-based and that arguments to the contrary are based upon a false premise.

In its initial complaint in June 2019, the ICA asserted that "... the model of practice chosen by the individual chiropractic practitioner, academic or researcher does not negate the validity of the model chosen by their colleagues. The underlying foundational principles of the WFC include an acknowledgement and respect for the variations that exist between international jurisdictions."

TAC: How do you see the ICA working to shape the future of chiropractic in the coming years and decades?

SW: Since its founding in 1926 by Dr. B.J. Palmer, the ICA mission has been to protect and promote chiropractic throughout the world as a separate and distinct health care profession predicated upon its unique philosophy, science, and art. Fifty years ago it was the ICA that initially supported the Wilks case and called for greater unity within the profession in order to take on the predatory practices of the American Medical Association (AMA). As chiropractic continues to grow outside the United States, many countries are beginning to experience that same anti-competitive

(restraint of trade) behavior. The ICA is once again calling for greater unity within the profession. Last year the ICA Board approved 5 new value statements dealing with Respect, Equitability, Empowerment, Collaboration and Transparency. The ICA hopes to set the standard and, by example, facilitate the collaboration necessary to move this profession to the next level.

TAC: What trend do you see amongst chiropractors is the most concerning through the lens of the mission and vision of the ICA?

SW: Since the success of the Wilks case over thirty years ago, there seems to be an increasing number of groups attempting to define chiropractic according to their terms. One group wants prescription drug rights, another wants to be the spine care experts, another group wants to practice functional medicine, and yet another wants to be just back pain specialists. It seems that today the profession is more divided than ever and that plays into the hands of our competitors in the healthcare marketplace. As a profession it is time to elevate our game. It is time to respect all of the various practice styles, devote some resources to do more of the clinical research that has received so little funding in the past. It is time to respect our differences and focus on what we all have in common. We are all chiropractors. Having access to a quality chiropractor, even one whose focus is different, is better for the public than having access to no chiropractor.

TAC: What is the ICA doing today to represent the needs of its chiropractors?

SW: The ICA is actively engaging with

ICA Recommends the creation of a World Federation of National Chiropractic Organizations in order to gain NGO status at the WHO.

The World Federation of Chiropractic was established in Sydney, Australia on October 2.

ICA Board member Dr. Gary Auerbach elected the 1st president of WFC

The WFC gains NGO status in January 1997.

Gregory Kawchuk & Jan Hartvisgen co-authored "Chiropractic, one big unhappy family: better together or apart?"

Promotion of "Divorce Paper" at Berlin Conference

ICA files formal complaint against Gregory Kawchuk & Jan Hartvisgen of the World Federation of Chiropractic Research Committee.

ICA publishes immunity white paper

Gregory Kawchuk & Jan Hartvisgen co-author 'Pseudoscience' Paper

Eight National Chiropractic Associations file complaint against ICA based upon online research paper.

1987

1988
OCTOBER

1989
SEPTEMBER

1997

2019
FEBRUARY

2019
MARCH

2019
APRIL

2020
MARCH

2020
APRIL

2020
JUNE

INTERVIEW

policymakers both in the United States and in countries around the world to defend the rights of its members to practice traditional chiropractic.

During the COVID pandemic, we were the first to publish a reminder that chiropractors are essential health care providers. We have engaged with state and federal authorities with a focus on educating to this fact, as well as providing factual information and assistance as requested. We established and continue to update a COVID resource page that has global coverage and I began doing regular videos for our membership.

- We are actively engaging with the Legislative and Executive branches of the U.S. federal government on eliminating the disparity policies for coverage and reimbursement of Doctors of Chiropractic and their patients in federal health care funded or managed programs. This includes HHS, VA, and DOD as well as the Congress.
- A top priority is Medicare, where we are focused specifically on eliminating the disparity in the treatment of chiropractors to other physician level providers, focused on the three top requests – reimbursement of exams and x-rays for chiropractic offices, and inclusion in the right for patients to privately contract with chiropractors (commonly referred to as the Opt Out provision). And we are doing so while protecting the subluxation terminology in the definition of

chiropractic rather than relegating it to a footnote.

- We are actively promoting the need for increased research resources for chiropractic colleges and have begun raising money for subluxation-focused research.

We also have begun the discussion and will continue doing so about the important opportunity that practiced-based research and research networks will offer to expand the evidence base.

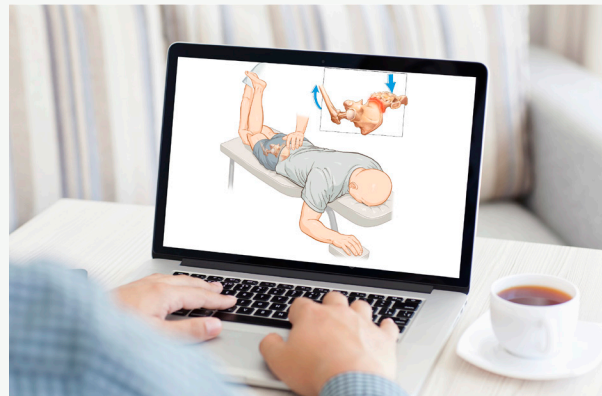
The importance of promoting quality clinical research that extends beyond the short term, or single thrust approach and expands to look at the whole person effect of regular chiropractic care.

The need for more basic science in chiropractic care.

Better understanding the whole body of evidence that supports chiropractic care, including research from outside the profession.

- We continue to educate about and promote the importance of chiropractic as a first line of care in pain management to reduce incidence of opioid abuse/addiction.
- We responded to a proposed regulatory change in British Columbia that would place restrictions on the use of x-rays based upon another fawed and rapid review.

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