



## Setting the record straight: New Zealand Chiropractors' Association response

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the article *Use of inappropriate titles by New Zealand practitioners of acupuncture, chiropractic, and osteopathy* by Gilbey and the editorial entitled “*Dr Who?...*” by Colquhoun.

Both articles contained false and unfounded statements which are highly insulting to the chiropractic profession and we wish to set the record straight. It is disappointing to see such material in an otherwise reputable journal. The articles amount to little more than derogatory potshots seeking to undermine the chiropractic profession, while hiding behind the guise of “free academic speech”. If the New Zealand Chiropractors' Association was contacted for clarification regarding the assumptions made, the authors, and *NZMJ* would have realised the error in publishing such antagonistic remarks.

Chiropractic is the third largest health care profession in the world, following medicine and dentistry and is at the cross roads of “mainstream and alternative”.<sup>1</sup> Chiropractors are highly trained, primary contact healthcare professionals with the legal right to use the courtesy title “doctor” on the proviso they distinguish themselves as a chiropractor in order to differentiate themselves from a medical doctor.<sup>2</sup>

The use of the courtesy title 'Dr' for medical practitioners, dentists, vets and chiropractors was also publicly declared acceptable by the NZ Ministry of Health official, Dr John Marwick, on national radio recently. The use of the title by chiropractors has never been intended to mislead the public into thinking the individual is a practitioner of medicine. NZ Chiropractors are in parity with their North American colleagues who are awarded the degree Doctor of Chiropractic. The title 'Doctor' is in no way the sole domain of medicine, as we only need to look at the academic world with Doctor of Laws, Doctor of Divinity, or Doctor of Philosophy.

Chiropractic in New Zealand is an independent health profession with statutory rights dating from legislation in 1960. We have a registration licensing board (the Chiropractic Board), scope of practice, code of ethics, and a professional association (New Zealand Chiropractors' Association). In order to practice chiropractic in NZ, an individual must pass the Board Competency Examinations and hold an Annual Practising Certificate. Eligibility to sit the examination is determined by graduating from an internationally accredited institution, generally with a masters, Doctor of Chiropractic, or similar degree. The NZ Chiropractic College qualification is modelled on the Bachelor's framework, similar to the MBChB degree.

Chiropractors undergo a minimum 5 year full-time tertiary education comprising no less than 4,200 hours instruction.<sup>3</sup> The extensive curriculum, specialising in chiropractic, includes diverse subjects such as; anatomy, biomechanics, biochemistry, neurology, philosophy, psychology, physics, physiology, radiography, radiology, along with spinal analysis and adjusting procedures. Many chiropractors also hold an additional Bachelors degree in a related health field, and some hold a PhD.

Today's chiropractors are indeed highly educated professionals who undergo rigorous academic and clinical training. The education to become a chiropractor compares favourably with medical training with similar overall course hours and many of the same basic subjects. In fact, in many areas chiropractors excel in comparison to their medical counterparts (such as neuro-musculo-skeletal anatomy and diagnosis, radiology, and manual spinal correction) as documented in several peer reviewed journals and other publications.<sup>3-9</sup>

Colquhoun's letter is so full of half truths, conjecture and misdirection that it is difficult to address anything of substance. Suffice to say that references to dubious internet blogs and journal articles that are themselves based on poor or incorrect data are unbecoming of any academic. This type of snide letter offers no meaningful discourse on the subject.

The poor "research" conducted by Gilbey is also not fitting for a Journal of this stature. In response to Gilbey's assertion that the issue of "title" could be prevented by adopting stricter UK advertising guidelines, we would like to point out that the UK Yellow Pages directory lists Chiropractors in their own section with their 'Dr' title. Their guidelines<sup>10</sup> specify that:

1. The title "Doctor" or "Dr" may be used provided the Advertiser is a qualified medical practitioner.
2. Advertisers qualified in other doctorates are also entitled to call themselves "Doctor" or "Dr" but must specify the subject so that users are aware if the qualification is non-medical.
3. Abbreviations may be used, e.g. "D.Ch." (Doctor of Chiropractic).

There is no doubt that a chiropractor advertising in the medical practitioner section of our NZ White Pages would be improper, but in no way is it incorrect when the 'Dr' title is used under the Chiropractors section of the Yellow Pages. Likewise, if a medical practitioner was to advertise in the chiropractors' section or hold themselves out to be a chiropractor they would be in breach of the HPCA Act 2003 and subject to disciplinary action.<sup>2</sup>

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