

**COMMENTARY: A REPORT ON THE CHIROPRACTIC EDUCATION  
COLLOQUIUM**

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## COMMENTARY: A REPORT ON THE CHIROPRACTIC EDUCATION COLLOQUIUM

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** This paper reports the proceedings of the 2014 chiropractic educational colloquium hosted by Macquarie University. Representatives from Australasian chiropractic educational institutions and major stakeholder groups in Australian chiropractic education came together to reflect on the collective professional effort.

**Objective:** The aim of the colloquium was to: (1) report historical aspects of chiropractic legislation and education in Australia, (2) inform relevant stakeholders of current best practice in chiropractic education, and (3) advise academic leaders on models of best practice in education.

**Discussion:** Presentations were provided by leading honorary life members, academics, regulators and industry advisors active in the Australian chiropractic profession. Two clear themes emerged: (1) that chiropractic educationalists play an important role in developing competencies of chiropractors and; chiropractic academics have an important responsibility to further the chiropractic profession's research capacity to ensure chiropractic has a place in Australian universities.

**Conclusion:** The colloquium provided an opportunity for Australian chiropractors to reflect on their progress in education to date and also identify the future direction of chiropractic education. Research activity remains a formative part of academic capacity building which leads to educational excellence. (Chiropr J Australia 2016;44:283-289)

Key Indexing Terms: Chiropractic; Education; Research; Leadership; Universities

### INTRODUCTION

On Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2014 the Department of Chiropractic in the Faculty of Science at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia hosted a Chiropractic Education Colloquium (hereafter referred to as the 'colloquium'). This event provided an opportunity for leading Australian and New Zealand stakeholders in chiropractic education to meet and reflect on pertinent issues facing the profession. Chiropractic education in Australia has a rich history that includes the world's first amalgamation of a chiropractic college with a public university - The Department of Chiropractic at Macquarie University.

The colloquium provided perspectives from leading honorary life members, academics, regulators and industry advisors active in the Australian chiropractic profession (Figure 1). Presentations were delivered by chiropractors: Dr Edwin P. Devereaux AM, Dr Phillip Donato OAM, Dr Roger Engel, Dr Michael Shobbrook, Dr Michael S. Swain, Dr John A. Sweaney AM; and an academic advisor to the chiropractic profession, Professor Peter Drake AM.. The colloquium was a free event attended by chiropractic academics representing Murdoch University, the New

Zealand College of Chiropractic, RMIT University and Macquarie University as well as interested chiropractors, students and members of the public; supported by the Chiropractors' Association of Australia NSW (major sponsor) [CAANSW], The Chiropractic and Osteopathic College of Australasia (COCA) and the HESTA superfund.



Figure 1. Speakers at the Chiropractic Education Colloquium 2014. (Back row, left to right) Roger Engel, Rosemary Giurato, Michael Shobbrook, Peter Drake, Michael Swain. (Front row, left to right) Edwin Devereaux, Phillip Donato, John Sweaney.

The colloquium was focused on several key areas: (1) the reporting of historical aspects of chiropractic legislation and education in Australia, (2) informing relevant stakeholders of current best practice in chiropractic education, and (3) advising academic leaders on models of best practice in education.

## DISCUSSION

### Content

The colloquium was opened and chaired by Dr Rosemary Giurato, Head of the Department of Chiropractic at Macquarie University.

Dr Devereaux spoke on '*The relationship between chiropractic legislation and education standards in Australia*' (1). In his historical review he described the establishment of chiropractic legislation in Australia and the important role of

profession driven educational standards in the developmental stages. Subsequently, chiropractic registration bodies mandated minimum educational standards which further facilitated the advancement of education for chiropractors in Australia. The introduction of tertiary level education in 1990 ensured: (1) the highest standards of training in spine related disorders; (2) best practice for the protection of the general public; (3) the profession was positioned to undertake research in the management of musculoskeletal conditions which, in Australia, was seen as an area requiring scientific appraisal.

Dr Sweaney discussed '*The role of academia in the development of the World Federation of Chiropractic (WFC)*' (2). Since inception, the WFC has played a strong role in scholarly activities and research promotion. The WFC has been successful in liaising with regional associations and local governments around the world to advance chiropractic registration and help establish tertiary level chiropractic programs. Chiropractic via the WFC gained non-government organisation status with the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1997, with Dr Sweaney playing a pivotal role in the development of the WHO guidelines (2005) for basic training and safety in chiropractic. The WFC and their placement within the WHO was pivotal in establishing international standards for chiropractic education.

Dr Shobbrook outlined '*The current standard of chiropractic education in Australia*' (3). He described the role of the Council on Chiropractic Education Australasia Inc. (CCEA) as an accrediting body, which undertakes a multi-level process aimed at evaluating and improving educational effectiveness. The accreditation function is undertaken by developing and benchmarking against industry standards, while being cognisant of the academic independence of chiropractic institutions. Dr Shobbrook highlighted that the current standards were by no means a barrier to innovation and the CCEA remains mindful of the rapidly evolving nature of health and education sectors.

Dr Donato, from the Chiropractic Board of Australia (CBA), presented on the topic of '*Maintaining and developing chiropractic clinical competency - A regulatory approach*' (4). He summarised chiropractic competencies which are based on the concept of a chiropractor; outlined by the Council on Chiropractic Education International (CCEI). The existence of competencies serves several purposes: legal factors, education (curriculum design), portability of qualifications, continuing professional learning objectives and driving safety approaches to clinical care. These competencies are focused at the pre-professional level, i.e. Graduates must attain a specific level of proficiency before they enter the healthcare system. Competencies exist for the protection of the public; simply put, the public have a right to expect a competent level of care from members of the healthcare community.

Dr Swain and Dr Engel spoke of the topic of '*Research in education and developing academic capacity*' (5). They provided their insights, as early career researchers into the process of building academic capacity within the chiropractic profession. The Research Skills Development Framework (6) was presented as an example of a tiered structure of problem solving skills which can be implemented within chiropractic coursework programmes. Opportunity exists for chiropractic coursework graduates, rich in content knowledge, to translate into research and academic

careers via candidature in formalised research training programs, e.g. Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD). The point was made that capacity building requires infrastructure, funding and appropriate mentorship. Dr Engel outlined the importance of having suitable project-work available for doctoral students. He gave an example of a fully powered clinical trial of manual therapy that is currently being conducted via interdisciplinary collaboration.

Professor Peter Drake shared his experience on '*Academic leadership in higher education*' (7). In his presentation, Professor Drake focused on departmental leadership, which he felt was most relevant for chiropractic departments in Australian universities. Professor Drake discussed both the role and function of the head of department in the modern university setting and described the challenges of balancing institutional responsibility and accountability with diminished authority. The crucial roles of recruitment, leadership, strategic planning and fostering collegiality were discussed. Professor Drake's advice was that chiropractic departments in university settings should aim to operate and collaborate equally with cognate disciplines to achieve cross disciplinary development.

The transcripts and the audio-visual recordings of the colloquium are available via Macquarie University's open access digital collection. These items can be accessed using the links in the bibliography.

Chiropractic education in Australia is currently at a crossroads (8). Australian universities are striving to develop their reputations as places of excellence. However, until recently some traditional chiropractic programmes have promoted pseudo-science (8, 9) and in turn jeopardised chiropractic from inclusion in government funded, mainstream tertiary education. Poor research output has also raised questions over chiropractic academic capacity (10), which is a key issue for Australian universities competing for governmental research funding, and prestige.

Representatives from 4 of the 5 Australasian chiropractic programs accepted invitations to attend the colloquium. In addition, representatives from all major stakeholder groups in Australian chiropractic education (CAA, COCA, CEA, CCEA, CBA) as well as past heads of programs and chiropractic educationalists came together to reflect on the collective professional efforts. The Australian government entrusts the CCEA and CBA to benchmark and maintain chiropractic accreditation standards and registration competencies. These competencies align with other cognate (allied) healthcare disciplines. Chiropractic educationalists play an important role in developing the necessary clinical competencies of chiropractors. Moreover, chiropractic academics whose appointments include significant research-related activity have an important responsibility to further the profession's capacity to ensure chiropractic education has a place in Australian universities. Heads of chiropractic programs must accept the challenge to ensure chiropractic education and academia meets the requirements of modern health care delivery.

## **CONCLUSION**

Events like the colloquium provide the Australian chiropractic profession with an opportunity to not only reflect on the progress in education to date, but also they

provide meaningful insight into requirements and future direction of chiropractic education. The importance of research cannot be understated. Research activity is a formative part of academic capacity building which leads to educational excellence. As reflected in the broad representative participation at the colloquium, stakeholders in chiropractic education are poised to meet the future needs of the chiropractic profession.

## FUNDING SOURCES AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Chiropractic Education Colloquium would not have been possible without the financial support of the Faculty of Science at Macquarie University, the Chiropractors' Association of Australia NSW (major sponsor), The Chiropractic and Osteopathic College of Australasia and the HESTA superfund.

The authors have no competing interests to disclose

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank the contribution made by the speakers at the Chiropractic Education Colloquium: Dr Edwin P. Devereaux AM, Dr Phillip Donato OAM, Dr Roger Engel, Dr Michael Shobbrook, Dr John A. Sweaney AM and Professor Peter Drake AM.

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