

Historical Vignettes: Important historical events that have shaped modern chiropractic practice in Australia.

Historical Vignette 1: An Introduction to Chiropractic Practice in Australia in 1982

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The year was 1982. This was toward the end of what Bolton labeled the Legislative Period (LP) in Australia (1). The LP, 1961 – 1985, was characterized by the enactment of comprehensive legislation regulating the practice of chiropractic in all Australian jurisdictions (2) as it was in Canada from where I migrated. During my years working in the fitness industry in Ontario Canada I had witnessed interprofessional cooperation between chiropractors and medical practitioners. During my years at Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College, I was taught by medical practitioners. I was naïve enough to expect the same would be true in Australia. However, upon arriving in Young, New South Wales, I quickly knew what Dorothy was referring to when she said, “Toto, I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore”.

The local GPs agreed to meet, provided I entered their clinic via the back door. They declined offers to visit my clinic situated directly opposite their because they could not be seen entering a ‘chiropractic clinic’. The hospital board blocked the agreement I had arranged with the local radiographer and visiting radiologist to take and review my x-ray requests. Despite these setbacks, the locals were very happy to have a full-time chiropractor in town, so the practise thrived in spite of the medical antipathy.

Following a relocation to outer Brisbane in 1984 it became apparent that anti-chiropractic sentiment was even stronger in Queensland. The Australian Medical Association (AMA) was vehemently anti-chiropractic. The AMA opposed recognition of chiropractic by governments and other agencies. It labelled chiropractic an exclusive dogma and reminded its members it was unethical to have dealings with an exclusive dogma such as chiropractic. In spite of the opposition, chiropractic registration was enacted in 1979 following two failed attempts, one in 1967 and a second in 1973 (3). In spite of further strong opposition by the Australian Medical Association (AMA) Worker’s Compensation covered chiropractic care for an injured worker provided the worker obtained a written referral from a General Medical Practitioner (GP), but the Medical Board of Queensland warned that such referrals would be in breach of the professional misconduct provisions of the Medical Registration Act (3). If a GP was bold enough to provide a referral, Worker’s Compensation would only pay for treatment of the spine and its immediate articulations because of the restrictive of chiropractic under the Queensland Chiropractic Manipulative Therapists [registration] Act. As if to ‘pre-load’ medical antipathy, a university professor was telling medical students “chiropractors regularly break patient’s necks”. In an effort to amplify its anti-chiropractic position, the AMA published *Chiropractic in Australia*, a scathing report against Australian chiropractors stating that “the philosophies which underlie conventional medicine and chiropractic are frankly incompatible” informing readers that chiropractic was unsafe, unscientific and dangerous but advising doctors to warn the public about potential dangers of chiropractic in circumspect terms (4). Individually these posed an impediment to patient care. In combination their negative effect was compounded. For example, the majority of GP’s in

Queensland considered it unethical to have professional dealings with chiropractors and would not refer an injured worker, even if the worker requested the referral (5).

Over time, these matters were dealt with through the perseverance of a dedicated number of association leaders. The removal of these impediments to chiropractic practice changed the chiropractic landscape for the better. For posterity's sake, through 4 Historical Vignettes, some of these significant events are presented from the perspective of one participant. Historical Vignettes 1-3 outline these impediments to interprofessional cooperation faced by Australian chiropractors and how they were dealt with by a band of dedicated association members. The first three were relatively easy tasks. Historical Vignette 4 recounts the 10-year David versus Goliath story of how perhaps the greatest impediment to the Australian chiropractic profession was dealt with. This refers to encouraging the Australian Medical Association (AMA) to remove its ethics-based boycott against chiropractic and revise its 'exclusive dogma' policy on chiropractic. The evolution of the AMAs policy has been recounted elsewhere (6), the backstory has not. Historical Vignette 4 tells that story.

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