

C.J. Mertz and Terry Rondberg: Is There Any Difference?

By James Edwards, DC

The May 20, 2004 issue of this publication contained my article, "Golfing With C.J."¹ For those who missed it, I outlined what many in the ACA were willing to do in order to bring about a merger of the ACA and ICA. Specifically, I assured ICA President Dr. C. J. Mertz that if the ACA and the ICA would explore a merger, I would work diligently to ensure that important ICA tenets were fully protected in the charter documents of the new organization. The particular tenets I vowed to protect were as follows:

- Chiropractic is and should remain a "separate and distinct" health care discipline.
- Correction of subluxations is the core of chiropractic.
- There is no place in chiropractic for drugs or surgery.
- The terms "chiropractic adjustment" (instead of spinal manipulation) and "subluxation" (instead of joint dysfunction) should be utilized when talking to legislators, policy-makers and the public.

I must admit that when writing that article, I was concerned about what my good friend C. J. would think, and about how such a bold personal initiative would be received by the profession. My concerns were misplaced, since not only did C. J. (who approved the article prior to publication) love it, but the article also generated the second largest amount of positive responses (behind only "The Four Biggest Lies in Chiropractic"²) I have ever received.

Any personal satisfaction was short-lived, because discord and dissention reared its ugly head just a few days later in an editorial by Dr. Terry Rondberg [World Chiropractic Alliance (WCA) President] that was published in the May 2004 issue of the WCA tabloid.³ The article, "Who's Really to Blame for Chiropractic Disunity," went on and on about how I am the single person in the profession who is responsible for its disunity. If you do not care about the unity issue and only want the point-counterpoint to stop, you should turn the page [or hit the "back" button on your browser] right now. However, if you are one of those - including most chiropractic students - who want to know the facts, the following will give you the unadulterated and documented truth.

To say the least, Dr. Rondberg's article contained numerous misstatements and outright untruths. Here are the seven most egregious allegations made - followed by the documented facts.

Misstatement #1: "Dr. Edwards said the policy was put into effect because the ICA and WCA refused to back the ACA's list of nominees for the VA Committee. He tried to convince everyone that we had 'promised' to do so, although no such promise was ever made."

The Documented Truth: While the VA bill was going through Congress, the ICA, ACA, WCA and the Association of Chiropractic Colleges (ACC) all signed a **written agreement** that stated each organization would support the five members of the DoD Chiropractic Oversight Committee and Dr. Carl Cleveland III. (This is a written promise that can be supplied to any reader who wants a copy.)

Misstatement #2: "Dr. Edwards made it clear that the ACA would not allow the ICA to be a free and independent organization. It would become part of the ACA whether they liked it or not. That's Dr. Edwards' idea of 'unity': One profession ruled and dominated by the ACA; all others eliminated."

The Documented Truth: No such statement was made or implied in any way. In fact, "Golfing With C.J." outlined all the core values that would be protected if the ICA were to begin merger discussions.

Misstatement #3: "Dr. Edwards even said he would get the ACA to promote the chiropractic postage stamp project that the WCA started - if I agreed to donate nearly \$10,000 to the ACA's "Save Our Subluxation" campaign. I took the money out of my own pocket and made what was then the single largest personal contribution."

The Documented Truth: That money came not from "his pocket," but from one of his companies. Nevertheless, his support was very much appreciated. Unfortunately, Dr. Rondberg has since encouraged his readers to discontinue their support for the HHS "subluxation" lawsuit. Although a B. J. Palmer postage stamp never had any real chance of becoming a reality at that time, the ACA fulfilled my commitment by promoting the stamp project in both its electronic and print publications.

Misstatement #4: "Although not a member of the VA Chiropractic Advisory Committee, he (Edwards) nominated Dr. Cindy Vaughn, his business partner and now his wife."

The Documented Truth: Dr. Cynthia Vaughn nominated herself for the VA Committee. I did not nominate her, and was not even aware that she was interested in the position at that time. All letters of nomination for the committee, including Dr. Rondberg's nomination of himself, are public record. For that reason, I challenge him to document his allegation by obtaining and publishing the letter of nomination he said I wrote. I assure you that he will not be able to do that, because no such letter of nomination was written by me.

Misstatement #5: "He (Edwards) attended every VA meeting and had frequent whispered conversations with her (Vaughn)."

The Documented Truth: I never had any "whispered conversations" with Dr. Vaughn at any meeting, since she is a highly capable doctor of chiropractic who is perfectly capable of making the right decision. On the other hand, attendees noticed "frequent whispered conversations" between the WCA lobbyist and WCA member Dr. Leona Fischer at several of the meetings. I also did not attend "every VA meeting." In fact, I was in New Mexico attending the ACA Board of Governors meeting in September 2003 when the vote in question occurred in Washington, D.C.

Misstatement #6: "The fact is, when Dr. Edwards talks about 'unity,' he's really talking about domination. It isn't just that he wants the ACA to be the dominant - better yet, the ONLY - organization in chiropractic, he lets his personal animosities rule not only his own actions, but those of the ACA."

The Documented Truth: As stated previously, "Golfing With C.J." outlined all the core values that I would try to protect if the ICA were to begin merger discussions.

Misstatement #7: "He's even flown to Washington, D.C., in order to tell these lies to legislators and oppose bills the Chiropractic Coalition supported."

The Documented Truth: I did not tell any lies when I flew to Washington, D.C., to meet

with key Congressional staff members. I simply told the truth about the WCA, its conflict-of-interest issues, how its proposed bill would strip "physician status" from doctors of chiropractic, and how the bill was opposed by 48 state chiropractic associations.

Having corrected the record, let's get back to the title of this article, so I can answer the question, "Is there any difference between Dr. C.J. Mertz and Dr. Terry Rondberg?" Very simply: **You bet there is!**

First and foremost, Dr. Mertz is the **elected** president of the ICA. Although the ACA and ICA do not always see eye to eye on every issue, the ICA nevertheless is a legitimate, representative chiropractic membership association that can trace its roots back to 1926 (as the Chiropractic Health Bureau); **4** has over 2,000 dues-paying members; and **elects** its volunteer leadership. It is also important to note that the ACA meets the same criterion of a legitimate, representative membership association, since the ACA can trace its roots back to 1906 (as the Universal Chiropractors Association);⁵ has over 15,000 dues-paying members; and also **elects** its volunteer leadership.

On the other hand, the WCA [and its president] appear to meet none of the above criteria, based on the following public information derived from the WCA Web site, publications, communications, corporate documents and ACA experiences with the organization:⁶

- The WCA filed official corporate documents in Arizona in 2000, indicating that it only had 240 "members" at that time. (It has not offered any information to indicate more significant numbers of verifiable members.)
- The WCA maintains a secret "membership" list, and is not listed in any recognized directory of membership associations, including the 2004 *Association Yellow Book*.
- The WCA does not permit its "members" to vote to elect the officers or other board members.
- The WCA maintains a non-elected president specifically designated in its charter documents as "President for Life."
- The WCA vice president (who is not a DC) is the son-in-law of its "President for Life," and its chief financial officer is the wife of the "President for Life." The "President for Life" and these two family members also hold positions (chairman of the board, chief operating officer, president and chief financial officer) with the family-owned, WCA-endorsed CBS malpractice insurance entity. (In the ACA's opinion, this gives the appearance that the association is being used to sell products and services for the benefit of the "President for Life" and his family.)

- The WCA fervently promoted a bill (HR 2560) that would have stripped physician status from DCs, and continued its efforts to promote this legislation, even though 48 state chiropractic associations officially opposed it.
- The WCA's actions on Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and Department of Defense (DoD) legislation helped promote the positions and interests of the American Medical Association, the American Physical Therapy Association and government bureaucrats.
- The WCA "President for Life" placed his interests above those of veterans by proclaiming to the VA Secretary: "I would rather see chiropractors excluded from the entire [VA] program rather than included for the wrong reasons." (This position was stated after Secretary Principi supported the Chiropractic Advisory Committee recommendations that heralded a new day for chiropractic care of veterans inside VA facilities, as well as opportunities for training doctors of chiropractic in VA facilities and involvement in VA research projects.)

So, what so inspired Dr. Rondberg's statements, and incurred his wrath toward me personally? I do not know. However, I suspect he is insulted and offended that the ICA has been continually invited to begin merger discussions - yet the WCA has never received such an invitation from the ACA.

And to be candid, I would bet my house that the WCA will never receive an ACA merger initiative, since "the WCA has significant and unacceptable conflicts of interest within its un-elected leadership, does not qualify as a representative membership association and does not have sufficient 'membership' to warrant consideration as a national or international decision-maker or representative voice for the chiropractic profession."⁷

In the final analysis, I suspect Dr. Rondberg lashed out so viciously because he now realizes that the chiropractic profession is beginning to figure out that the WCA is primarily a vendor-driven group will never be invited to merge with the ACA. Perhaps that is the one thing he got right.

(Author's note: The opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author, and other than the ACA statement specifically referenced, do not necessarily represent the opinions, policies or positions of the American Chiropractic Association.)

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