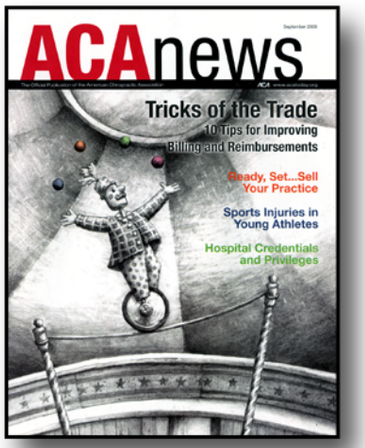

A Path to Practice

Chiropractic neurologist relies on education and professionalism to overcome chiropractic skeptics.

Curiosity about nutrition as a youngster and sports participation as a teen put Mark Saracino, DC, DACAN, on the path to becoming a chiropractic neurologist. Even as a child, he noticed the difference that eating healthy food, back rubs and regular sports activities made in the way he felt. After briefly pursuing an education in machine technology and mechanical engineering, he found himself attracted to the health sciences, and in particular the self-expression and professional and financial freedom of chiropractic—while fully aware that it might not be the easiest road to follow.

Why did you become a chiropractor?
I researched careers in medicine, nursing, physical therapy and other healthcare professions. The only holistic and independent profession was chiropractic. I wanted as much control over my destiny and my ability to lead a healthy lifestyle as possible.

Why did you go to National?
I knew there was skepticism about chiropractic among the public and medical providers. When I started out in the mid-'80s, chiropractic was not completely understood and accepted on the East Coast. So I chose National because I thought it was the best school. Its prerequisites, term and curriculum are the most rigorous. I wanted to be fully prepared to answer difficult questions about chiropractic.

You've treated many actors and dancers over the years. How so?
My office is adjacent to a hotel that had a dinner theater. It was only natural that some of the performers would find their way to me. One day, a dancer suggested I help out at a ballet studio a few towns away—I served 18 years as a board member there! Word got out after awhile that I was the go-to chiropractor for the arts community.

What did you learn from that experience?
I learned quite a bit about treating performing arts injuries. Dancers are part of a small and underfunded area of the performing arts in America. Their art is very punishing on the body, and they struggle to exist—let alone be in a position to access the best care for their injuries. I was also surprised by how little they knew about preventing and treating injuries; amateur athletes know more about sports nutrition and injury prevention than performers.

Do you have any memorable moments working with the arts?
I was invited to lecture on prevention and home treatment of performing arts injuries to the Bolshoi Ballet and Taganka (drama) Theater Companies in Moscow and the State Ballet Theater Company in Yekaterinburg, Russia. Attending the Bolshoi's rehearsals, then seeing performances by invitation from Ilse Liepa, one of its principals whom I'd met previously in Wilmington, Del., was most memorable. Touring Europe in 1991 with the Parsons Dance Company of New York is another special memory.

Has community involvement through the arts helped your practice?
Yes, definitely. Educating the community about what we do is critical to overcoming skepticism. I also write articles for magazines and, when appropriate, send copies to patients and medical doctors. Since DCs still only treat 8 to 13 percent of the population, skepticism persists. The consequences of inappropriate advertising and marketing greatly affect the profession. Notice that many patients do not continue with prescribed short-term therapy plans. It is because of what they hear about chiropractic—long-term treatments that never end, unprofessional salesmanship and scare tactics? There's a fine line between professionalism and salesmanship that should never be crossed.

What else will help chiropractic confront naysayers?
We need scientific validation from research. Let's prove that we are the best at what we do, and that no one else should be doing it without training based on *our* high standards. Oh course, this comes with a high price. DCs must maintain their association memberships and enlist others to join who have been riding our coat tails. Elevating the prerequisites and standards at our colleges is another way to quiet critics and attract the best students. National has a five-year term and was one of the first to require a bachelor's degree before matriculation. ■

Comments welcomed: Mark.Saracino1@juno.com, www.DrSaracino.com

Minute With a Member

Mark Saracino, DC, DACAN

Age: 52

Family
Never married, but a large nuclear and extended family

Practice
King of Prussia, Pa.

Education
National University of Health Sciences, DC and BS in Human Biology, 1982; Logan College of Chiropractic, Diplomate in Clinical Neurology, 1992

Professional Activities
ACA member since 1983; ACA Council on Neurology; American Chiropractic Neurology Board; Pennsylvania Chiropractic Association member since 1983

Other Activities
Consultant to Greg Thompson Productions Inc., Seattle, Wash., and Parson's Dance Company, New York, N.Y.; Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, Narbeth, Pa. (board member); Main Street Theatre, Quakertown, Pa. (president); Valley Forge Weightlifting Club, Valley Forge, Pa.; attending and ringside physician to the Professional Karate Assn., Atlantic City, N.J.; International All-Around Masters Olympic and Power Weightlifting Championships, Collegeville, Pa.

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