

# The Direction of Chiropractic Pediatric Research by Dr. Claudia Anrig

## Q&A: Dr. Brian Kelly, Life West President

I would like to start this article by welcoming **Dr. Brian Kelly** and congratulating him as the new president of Life Chiropractic College West. Dr. Kelly, for those who haven't had the pleasure of meeting you yet, can you share some of your experiences from your tenure as president of New Zealand College of Chiropractic (NZCC)? I was practicing full time in Melbourne, Australia, for 11 years, and was invited to join the Board of Trustees of the NZ College. Two years later an opportunity arose to apply for the presidency. Little did I think I would ever work in education! I was president for eight years (2003-2011) and thoroughly enjoyed it.

During this time, enrollment grew, we achieved accreditation with the CCE (Australasia), developed a meaningful research department and moved to a new campus. This was achieved while maintaining a vitalistic approach to chiropractic.

At NZCC you had a strong emphasis on research; why do you consider research such an important component of chiropractic? A profession is defined (in part) by its unique body of knowledge. In fact chiropractic is a philosophy, art *and* science. Unless a profession continually works at answering great research questions, it may not evolve or have the same level of credibility as those that do. For example, imagine finding out better ways of taking care of patients? That alone would be one reason to do research. To this end, I served on the board of the Australian Spinal Research Foundation for 11 years. We raised funds and gave grants to chiropractic researchers.



*It's my understanding that your directive to the research department at Life West includes three missions: investigating the chiropractic effect on the nervous system, pediatric chiropractic and quality-of-life issues. Please share why you feel those specific areas are important for the profession and the general public.* The nervous system is our domain in practice. However, in chiropractic, we seem to have moved further away from the spine and the nervous system in recent years. Paradoxically, it is where we get the greatest results with patients.

Quality-of-life outcomes are really where the "rubber meets the road." For too long, we have performed research in the profession that is reductionistic in its design and methodology, and has often missed the point of the DC-patient encounter. Part of the "quality of life" issue is the economic benefits to society. This is the piece that, in my opinion (coupled with our safety record), will give us the greatest leverage with legislators and the court of public opinion. No other profession comes close to us on this.

With respect to chiropractic children's research, as a profession we just haven't done enough work. There are jurisdictions in the world where it is illegal for chiropractors to see kids, and others are considering limiting the right of chiropractors to see children (especially asymptomatic children). As a profession, we have a responsibility to look at this.

If the chiropractic profession doesn't do the research – who will? I know from personal experience (as a child receiving care; as a parent of kids who had care; and of seeing kids in my practice over many years) the difference between a child who grows up with regular chiropractic care and one who doesn't. It's like night and day. A child who grows up with regular chiropractic care expresses closer to their potential, and is more balanced across many domains, than those who don't have the opportunity.

Recently you announced that **Dr. Joel Alcantara**, research director for the International Chiropractic Pediatric Association (ICPA), has joined the research team at Life West as the newly appointed chair of pediatric research. Can you tell us what made you decide to extend this collaborative invitation? I have followed Dr. Alcantara's career for a number of years. He is a rising star in the chiropractic research world and a prolific author. He has a philosophy on life that is congruent with that of Life West, and he has a strong work ethic.

I have also been impressed with the work of the International Chiropractic Pediatric Association (ICPA), which began a conversation regarding collaborative synergies. At Life West, we are most excited about this [collaboration] and believe it will have many positive outcomes for the profession.

How do you see Dr. Alcantara's experience as the head of research at the ICPA benefiting the profession? He will continue to produce high-quality research; we all benefit from this. He will also continue to inspire others to participate in research – even if it is writing a case report or contributing financially. He will also inspire others to begin a career in research.

Can research in the field of pediatrics contribute to changing the general public's perception of chiropractic care as part of a wellness lifestyle, and if so, how? Only if the work we do is of the highest quality and validates the benefits of care for children. I believe the profession needs to support quality research that is congruent with their practice model – a lot more than is currently occurring. To say, "I'm doing OK in practice, [so] I don't need the research" kind of misses the bigger picture.

Dr. Kelly, as a father of young children who are checked and adjusted on a regular basis, how do you want your personal experience as a parent to translate as an opportunity to educate? It's different having health care opinions about children when they are your own children. For example, your child has a fever in the middle of the night; what do you do? Some chiropractors default to Tylenol or medical care, and don't back their own philosophy. The amount of drugs used in American society is out of control. We are 5 percent of the world's population, and yet we consume 50 percent of the world's **pharmaceuticals**. It might make some sense if it made us healthier – but it hasn't.

Being a parent has given me a different authority with patients' children because a number of health issues they've faced as parents I have been through as a parent. I recall when our kids were young and the only thing we would offer them to drink was water, or water and ice. Other parents used to scoff and smirk about that. Ten years later, the same parents were asking why our kids were so healthy. They weren't laughing anymore.

We have to be congruent. Congruency is one of my priorities in education at Life West. For example, we recently took soft drinks out of the vending machines and got rid of clinic jackets. They never really made sense to me.

Finally, how do you want to influence a new generation of chiropractors as the newly appointed president of Life West? I want them to be proud to be chiropractors and have high self-esteem. I want them to be deep thinkers and have a love of the philosophy of chiropractic, and of life itself. I see them having a desire to serve that is greater than serving themselves.

I see them having a great thirst for knowledge; well-read, artful adjustors and excellent communicators. I see them as *members* of chiropractic who contribute to the profession – not just take from it. Above all, I want them to go out into practice and fall in love with it.

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Dr. Kelly assumed the presidency of Life West in January 2011, months after longtime president **Dr. Gerry Clum** announced his retirement from the college to pursue other professional opportunities. To learn more, read "Dr. Brian Kelly to Assume Life West Helm" in the **Dec. 2, 2010** issue. And for background on Dr. Joel Alcantara's recent appointment as chair of pediatric research at Life West, read "Dr. Joel Alcantara Joins Life West" in the **Oct. 7, 2011** issue (News in Brief).