

The Chiropractic Game-Changer

Logan Alum Stands Up for DCs by Tackling Industry Inequalities

A group of New Jersey chiropractors are making history.

Their seven-year legal battle against Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey finally came to an end in June 2016 after the insurance company was found in violation of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA). A federal judge approved a \$33 million settlement, representing five years of restitution for New Jersey chiropractors who were denied reimbursement for non-chiropractic manipulative therapies, such as traction, ultrasound, EMS etc.

That win is just one recent significant outcome of work conducted by members of the Association of New Jersey Chiropractors (ANJC) led by their president, December 1982 Logan graduate Steven Clarke, DC. However, the mission to serve as a voice and advocate for DCs, as well as fighting injustices against the profession, started more than 30 years ago.

'Can't complain unless you get involved'

In January 1983, the future of Doctors of Chiropractic practicing in the State of New Jersey looked bleak. Outdated

state laws prevented chiropractors from providing any kind of care or treatment beyond the articulations of the spinal column and related structures.

Dr. Clarke, a determined new graduate, headed back home to The Garden State where he found work as an associate at a chiropractic practice in Nutley, N.J. "I was well educated at Logan but not familiar with the ins and outs of the profession, especially on the licensing, but I started hearing things," he said.

Little by little, Dr. Clarke was introduced to various doctors, several who were working to promote chiropractic in the state. Eventually, a number of the chiropractic leaders in the ANJC asked Dr. Clarke to get involved on the legislative committee. "I said, I don't know anything about legislation." And they said, "You'll learn."

It turns out Dr. Clarke was the right person for the job. He was energetic and wanted to get involved. He was also "tired of getting beat up by the insurance companies" and working under the most restrictive scope of practice in the country, meaning DCs couldn't adjust extremities unless it was directly related to the hip, pelvis or spine.

"Well, you can't complain unless you get involved," he said. "The ANJC shared their experiences, and after a while I started learning, understanding and developing strategies."



Dr. Steven Clarke speaking to the Association of New Jersey Chiropractors

Dr. Clarke immersed himself in articles, attended meetings, met with lobbyists and state legislators and studied legislative policies. In 2001, he was appointed ANJC's Legislative Chair.

In addition to laws that hadn't changed since the early 1950s, the state of professional organizations for chiropractors in New Jersey was complicated. Half a dozen associations of varying opinions existed, getting very little accomplished on their own to advance the DC profession.

"Finally we realized there was never going to be any change if we didn't unite and get organized," he said. "Several of the groups decided to collaborate, pool our resources and get one lobbyist and one executive director. Eventually, all but one group came together. We hired an attorney, a public relations team and established a headquarters. Our executive director was not only a chiropractor but had a business mind."



Dr. Steven Clarke at Logan's Homecoming in 2011

“Our unwritten motto at ANJC is we’re going to take on any issue we have to take on. This is our profession, our life. We’re changing people’s lives and defending our vocation. We’re not sitting back. We’re going to fight.”

—Dr. Steven Clarke

With structure and a well-defined purpose, Dr. Clarke and his colleagues set out to work on the current laws in place. He and other members examined scopes of practice for every other state, looking at what worked and what didn’t.

“We were the only state whose chiropractic scope of practice didn’t include a provision about nutrition and we wanted it. We also wanted continuing education to be a requirement for DCs,” he said.

‘Strengthening the profession’

Five years later in January 2010, New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine signed the proposed Chiropractic Scope of Practice into law.

“No one ever expected we’d get it done,” Dr. Clarke said. “So many people were fighting us from the medical profession. Every time there was a question or issue, we would have to defend it. We had to testify at Assembly and Senate hearings, provide articles and research. We traveled up and down the entire state to meet with virtually every legislator to explain the issues so that they would understand the importance of the legislation.”

While there were many wins along the way, there were also a few losses.

The ANJC wanted the scope of practice to include acupuncture, but that was denied. On the other hand, they secured mandatory continuing education. Today, licensed New Jersey chiropractors must obtain 30 credits of continuing education every two years—two of those credits must be in nutrition and two must be in the rules and regulations of record keeping.

Dr. Clarke said 2010 really changed things in New Jersey, allowing the profession to finally start using what had been taught in chiropractic school in practice. “It also codified many of the loose ends we had in our regulations and strengthened our profession,” he said. “From top to bottom it was a strong team effort and something that has brought us continued victories against strong odds.”

It was also a turning point for the ANJC. Membership grew and DCs felt the state association was truly fighting for them. Of the 2,300 licensed chiropractors in New Jersey today, 2,000 are members of ANJC, making it the seventh largest chiropractic association in the United States.

“Whenever there is negative publicity involving chiropractic, we are on top of it,” he said. “We send talking points and research to our members and provide them with the resources and support they need. Members know that we are very responsive to the needs of the chiropractic profession inside and outside of our state.”

‘We’re going to fight’

Looking back at the events of the past 30 years, Dr. Clarke credits a solid foundation at Logan with preparing him to take on challenges both in practice and in the profession.

“When you’re in school—in the daily grind—it’s hard, but when you get out and start practicing, you realize what a good education it is,” said Dr. Clarke. “It’s definitely something you don’t truly appreciate until you’re speaking with patients, other doctors or others in health care.”

In 2006, Dr. Clarke was named New



Dr. Steven Clarke with Congressman and former Philadelphia Eagle Jon Runyon

Jersey Chiropractor of the Year, and five years later, he was named Alumnus of the Year by the Logan Alumni Association. More recently, he met with members of Logan’s administration, who praised the ANJC for their efforts that champion DCs and the mission of chiropractic.

Dr. Clarke says the success of ANJC lies with the talents and efforts of people who have made the organization so dynamic.

“The ANJC has so many great volunteers,” he said. “We have good legal minds—good insurance and legislative minds—everyone has their own niche. We ask everyone to do a little bit and all together we can take a step back and say, ‘Look at what we’re getting done.’”

While some of the biggest hurdles may have been cleared, Dr. Clarke and the ANJC continue to work on behalf of the profession to ensure equality and access to chiropractic care. New Jersey, as of recently, is the only state which requires chiropractic assistants to be licensed—another initiative of Dr. Clarke and the ANJC.

“When you start getting wins, I suppose you think, what’s next, what else can I do?” said Dr. Clarke. “Our unwritten motto at ANJC is we’re going to take on any issue we have to take on. This is our profession, our life. We’re changing people’s lives and defending our vocation. We’re not sitting back. We’re going to fight.”