

# The Update

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## Balance or Bias

By

**Gregory Stetzel, DC**

Have you ever noticed that the media always goes to great lengths to provide balance and to present both sides of the story when reporting on chiropractic? In the interest of bringing the whole story to their readers or viewers, they will invariably locate and interview a medical doctor who will contradict everything that the chiropractor in the article has to say. They claim that they are just trying to present the truth.

Perhaps you have had the experience of being invited to participate in a news story or interview with the media as a representative for chiropractic in your community. You did your homework and prepared your message. You met with the reporter who was very nice and who seemed interested in your point of view and the volume of information that you presented to back up your statements about the efficacy of chiropractic care in helping to optimize health. And then, the article came out and you found yourself reading things you never said or that had been taken completely out of context. Or worse, they printed just what you said and followed up with the local medical doctor who refuted your every word and tainted the article with the sense that chiropractic

was dangerous and scientifically unfounded. Was it balance or bias?

A recent internet article from KETV.com is a case in point. To see the article, click on this link: <http://www.ketv.com/health/23627118/detail.html>

The author doesn't even wait to get into the discussion to throw the first punch. He makes the intent of the article clear in the heading:

### “Chiropractor Touts Work On Newborns”

### “Pediatrician Says Spinal Adjustments On Children 'Unnecessary'”

How's that for balance?

The pediatrician provided only one quarter of the text of the piece and claimed that children will get better eventually on their own regardless of intervention so chiropractic is probably unnecessary, particularly if the good parent makes sure they are getting appropriate medical care. Yet his statement headlines the article as if it were about him and his belief. The fact that the chiropractor actually presents his case fairly well and that a satisfied patient is interviewed and supports his position with her choice to have her children adjusted is lost in the

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title. Unfortunately, there are people who only read the headline and make their minds up from that – another life lost to ignorance.

Since our society places so much trust in the word of the media and spends such an inordinate amount of time watching the news, reading newspapers, surfing the internet, and blogging, we cannot ignore their influence and must find a way to participate that supports our cause and represents our profession in a positive and beneficial manner. It is our responsibility to carefully choose our venue and protect our image and that of our profession every time we venture into the media.

To be fair, there are some good, honest journalists out there who are willing to publish articles based on facts or well formed interviews. Yet, the fact remains that controversy sells print and many journalists function under the credo that if you don't smell smoke – light a match. So, vigilance is key.

Vigilance may not be as simple as it would seem when it comes to working with the media. In most cases a reporter/journalist approaches you to be included in an interview about the benefits of chiropractic care for this or that and presents it as an opportunity to let the local community find out about you and your service. They usually make no mention of their intent to "balance" the piece with rebuttal from the local MD who they view as the true authority in the health arena. It is up to you to guard your reputation and take the necessary precautions to see that your message doesn't get hijacked.

A few simple steps can go a long way toward protecting yourself but

be forewarned. If you insist on maintaining control of your message, you may lose some opportunities while you retain your dignity.

When contacted by a media representative with the offer of a lifetime to present your story, inform them that you will only participate if they agree to your terms. First, and perhaps most importantly, you want a guarantee that you will have final, pre-publication approval of the finished article before it is released. You want this guarantee in writing and signed by someone in authority who is able to assure you that your terms will be met. You also want the right to 'kill' the piece if they take it in a direction that is damaging to your reputation or to the profession, also in writing. Ask the representative if they will be presenting an opposing viewpoint and if so who they will be interviewing. If they are bringing in someone you know to be negative on chiropractic, object and refuse to participate if they will not present you in a positive manner. After all, you have nothing to lose but your reputation.

BJ once said that he didn't care what they said about him in the newspapers so long as they spelled his name right. While exposure can be a good thing for you, your practice, and your profession, setting yourself up for a loss makes little sense. If nothing else, make sure they spell your name right.

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