

**Brett Kinsler, DC, interviews John Reggars, DC, an Australian skeptical chiropractor, on the crossroads of science vs. subluxation.**

7<sup>th</sup> May 2011

Link: <http://ontheotherhand.podbean.com/2011/05/07/ep-26-australian-chiropractor-dr-john-reggars-on-the-crossroads-of-science-vs-subluxation/>

**KINSLER** Hi, it's Dr Brett Kinsler, and this is *On The Other Hand*, the podcast that represents the responsible voice of chiropractic.

[SPONSORSHIP segment...]

**KINSLER** Frequently chiropractors are directed to countries in Europe and Scandinavia for examples of a science based, well integrated chiropractic, and many people assume that the 3700 chiropractors who practice in Australia are in a similar situation, but what is chiropractic like Down Under? At least one doctor says that chiropractic in Australia is currently at a crossroads between subluxation and science. As Konrad Adenauer once said we all live under the same sky but we don't all have the same horizon.

**REGGARS** My name is John Reggars. I'm a chiropractor. I've been a chiropractor for nearly 40 years. I'm also currently an adjunct senior lecturer at the School of Chiropractic at Murdoch University in Western Australia, and I've served on many positions on professional associations, and I'm President of the Chiropractic and Osteopathic College of Australia, which is COCA. I'm currently Vice President of that particular college, but I've got to hasten to add that the opinions that I express in this interview are purely my own and are not those necessarily of the college.

**KINSLER** And now we have the fine print...

**REGGARS** Yes.

**KINSLER** John, along with that not so busy sounding schedule I believe you recently published, or you're about to publish, a paper in *Chiropractic & Manual Therapies*, a paper entitled 'Chiropractic At The Crossroads Or Are We Just Going Around In Circles?'. Tell me about that.

**REGGARS** I thought it was actually going to be published by the time of this interview, but it'll be, hopefully, maybe only a few days away from hitting the press. And it's an online journal, *Chiropractic & Manual Therapies*, so it's free access to anyone, so if you're interested after this interview they can have a look at the full paper.

**KINSLER** John, do you know the address for *Chiropractic & Manual Therapies* off hand?

**REGGARS** <http://chiromt.com/>

**KINSLER** [Repeats URL]

**REGGARS** So this particular paper - I'll give you a summary of the paper and then I'll sort of elaborate as to why I thought it necessary to write the paper. In

summary, the paper provides an overview of the development of chiropractic in Australia over the past 30 years. It's my view of the profession from the early days of the 1930s, before chiropractic was regulated and chiropractors become government registered health professionals, through the push for evidence based practice to the sad state we're in today. We seem to be going around in circles and the problems we faced 30 years ago are the same ones we face today, and in many ways I think the problems are even worse. What prompted me to write the paper was I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore. Are you familiar with that quote, Brett?

**KINSLER** I am. Remind me of what – was it *Network*?

**REGGARS** The quote came from *Network* - an Academy Award-winning actor, Peter Finch, who coincidentally was an Australian. The movie was made in 1976 and Finch was a fictional television newscaster who became somewhat frustrated with the country's level of crime, terrorism, inflation, and the poor state of the environment and public apathy - and I might also add his ratings were down. So he got angry, and he made the impassioned plea to his American audience to do something about it. So he stared down the camera in one of his newscasts and asked the Americans to get out of their chairs, open up their windows, and shout out their head off "I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore". And they did. And in the movie we see scenes of people like [inaudible] screaming this out... "I'm as mad as hell". And hopefully this article will engender debate within the chiropractic profession about its current state, but also, hopefully, it will prompt the silent majority within the profession to get up out of their chairs, open their windows, and to also shout out "I'm as made as hell, I'm not going to take this any more".

**KINSLER** So what's making you mad as hell about chiropractic in Australia? What are the big issues?

**REGGARS** Well, I think probably the biggest issue to chiropractic here, and I would hazard a guess to say for the rest of the world, is the vertebral subluxation or the Vertebral Subluxation Complex as I like to call it. But it's not so much the subluxation itself, but it's the way it's used by chiropractors and the professional organisations, and the way that it's taught in some teaching institutions. The late Joe Keating wrote: "The dogma of subluxation is perhaps the greatest single barrier to professional development for chiropractors. It skews the practice of the art in directions that bring ridicule from the scientific community and uncertainty among the public. Failure to challenge subluxation dogma perpetuates a marketing tradition that inevitably prompts charges of quackery." Then he goes on to say: "Subluxation dogma leads to legal and political strategies that may amount to a house of cards and warp the profession's sense of self and of mission." And I think that's true today. There's no doubt we're a pack of cards and we're going to topple at any point unless we quickly make some fundamental changes.

**KINSLER** You know, there's actually a split in the scientific chiropractic camp right now where some of them are actually pushing to study and further define subluxation and see if it exists at all, and some just think that we should do away with the terminology entirely.

**REGGARS** That's true. We talk about research. There are some really good researchers producing some very, very, good studies. And then you have pseudoscience which is promulgated by the subluxation fundamentalists. In Australia, we've yet to establish a significant, sustainable, research culture. We have a small number of highly talented researchers who are regarded in high

esteem internationally, and there's a push within the chiropractic program to nurture and grow a research culture. But, as you know, research costs money and the funds available are few and far between. So COCA just recently (that's the Chiropractic and Osteopathic College of Australia) just recently established a research fund which hopefully in the not too distant future will be able to provide those much needed funds. In Australia, on the other side of the coin, we have the Australian Spinal Research Foundation which is closely allied to the Chiropractors Association of Australia, which basically is a subluxation-based group. But the ASRF has narrowed their research focus to only studies involving subluxation complex. I think some time ago, also, the Chiropractors Association of Australia also came to the realisation that they no longer rely on testimonials, and case studies, anecdotal research, to support the subluxation theory - but I stand to be corrected - but to my knowledge there's no worthwhile research to demonstrate that the VSC even exists let alone has an adverse impact on health, or that the removal of the VSC has a positive impact on health. It's really still a theoretical construct, and in contemporary healthcare basing a therapy on some misguided and unproven theory - and importantly one that carries a risk - is really not sustainable. I mean there are some research to suggest that spinal manipulation may have... sometimes see systemic effects, but this research is about spinal manipulation, it's got nothing to do with subluxation. I mean, if we look at the way CAA and the ASRF has attempted to support its position with so-called evidence...and I stated in my paper that it's invariably a congeal mix of reality and half truths, and terrific quotes that are misused and overstated. Phillips in 2004 in *Chiropractic Humanities*, and I like this quote: "Chiropractic fundamentalists have sought to make their philosophy more acceptable in today's world by guising scientific rationality under the cloak of emotionality. They selectively incorporate scientific findings that support their magic premise or shunning or ignoring scientific findings incongruent to their way of thinking."

**KINSLER** What's an example of that? Tell me about how you think the scientific literature might be misused or misrepresented by the fundamentalist subluxationists.

**REGGARS** I suppose the one that springs to mind relates to an article published in the Australian Spinal Research Foundation's newsletter entitled 'Flu Prevention Should Include Chiropractic: Tell Your Patients Why'. It's written by Matthew McCoy, whom you may be familiar with.

**KINSLER** Yeah.

**REGGARS** Editor of JVSJ.

**KINSLER** Which in the scientific community we call the "Journal of Very Silly Research".

**REGGARS** Yes, I didn't say that, you said that.

**KINSLER** I don't think they're going to sponsor me, so ...

**REGGARS** And he goes on to say that "through research we know that has beneficial effects on pulmonary function and other immune system processes", and then he quotes from the study by Patricia Brennan, the one on the enhanced neutrophil respiratory burst which was conducted, by the way, 20 years ago. I think you're familiar with that particular study?

**KINSLER** I am, and I remember everybody being very excited about that until they determined that there's a possibility that that fact - that there's an immune

respiratory burst - might actually be a defence mechanism in the body rather than an activation of the immune system.

**REGGARS** You could easily argue that it's just a normal reaction to a noxious stimulus.

**KINSLER** Right.

**REGGARS** I mean, all this study really showed was that if you push on someone's back hard enough you're going to get a temporary change in certain blood markers like [inaudible]. I mean, you might as well hit someone on the back with a [inaudible] and get the same change.

**KINSLER** I think there is a chiropractic technique like that, but the name of it escapes me.

**REGGARS** Yes, so...but...even Brennan in their conclusion stated that it was "tempting to speculate on the possible biological significance of our results in terms of potential for improved [inaudible] against invading micro-organisms, and in terms of implications in mild inflammatory processes, such as hyper-mobile joints, we believe such speculation to be unjustified by the data presented". Yet this particular study is trotted out time and time again as a defence for...as support for chiropractic treatment to improve immune function.

**KINSLER** And that's the basis for the recommendation for using chiropractic for flu?

**REGGARS** Yes.

**KINSLER** Is still that one questionable paper?

**REGGARS** And you now I see...I saw an a-board just the other day outside a chiropractor's office saying improve your immune function by 48% with chiropractic care. And, of course, there are other studies which are similar that they use, but particularly for this immune function which, when analysed, just don't stand up.

**KINSLER** Was this always the case in Australia? Is this what chiropractic looked like, say, back in the 70s?

**REGGARS** No - in some ways yes, in some ways no. In the 70s I suppose it was much like it is today. The majority of chiropractors focused on the treatment of musculoskeletal conditions. Subluxations to many of us were just manipulable lesions that caused pain and dysfunction and we treated it with manipulation, and that was probably true for most chiropractors who graduated from Australian colleges like myself. They didn't have...subluxations didn't have attached to them Innate or chiropractic philosophy. But there was the other group, the American-trained group, who embraced the founding tenets of chiropractic and practiced accordingly, treating literally every known disease to man with spinal manipulation, or spinal adjustment. But you've got to remember this - that these were the times before evidence-based practice and the limited amount of research that was conducted at the time was really of poor quality and most of the research was anecdotal. So, because we were unregulated, we were really the masters of our own destiny. We didn't have the regulators looking over our shoulder and were really only accountable to ourself, and things seemed to be pulling along reasonably well. The subluxationists didn't really create much of a fuss, lay more in the background, it wasn't much of a priority on their agenda. In

1977, before chiropractic was regulated, there was a government report published, the Webb Report, which was a commission inquiring about chiropractic, osteopathy, naturopathy and homeopathy – this report paved the way for registration of chiropractors with government-funded chiropractic teaching institutions, research culture. Directly related to the establishment of the first government-funded chiropractic course in the world, known as the [inaudible] - and this report laid the foundation for recognition of chiropractic as a mainstream healthcare discipline. This was probably the first crossroads the profession faced. As Webb, the author of this report said - that chiropractors should be registered, but should not take any form of an alternative health profession. In other words, it had to fit into the mainstream. This is at odds with how the Chiropractors Association of Australia sees chiropractic's place in public health. They like to see chiropractic as the most cost-efficient and effective health regime of first choice. So they see it as an alternative health scene. Webb also stated in his paper that there's evidence there, but it's anecdotal - evidence it may be, but it's not scientific evidence.

**KINSLER** That's a great line, by the way.

**REGGARS** It is a great line.

**KINSLER** There's evidence there, but it's not scientific evidence.

**REGGARS** And unfortunately the chiropractic fundamentalists of this profession tend to either use the pseudoscience or this anecdotal evidence to support their views. So, for many, they just continue down the same road. After registration in 1979, the RMIT University course was established and I saw some positive changes in the profession. The course at RMIT can rightly hold the crown for being the best in the world. The students were well educated in the sciences and were by and large not indoctrinated with chiropractic philosophy. Chiropractic treatment at that time was included in most compensation, transport and accident insurance, private health insurance funds, and we also had the beginnings of a research culture emerging. So that was probably up until the early 90s.

**KINSLER** So you see that as a pivotal point? Is that one of the crossroads you talk about in your paper?

**REGGARS** That was one of the crossroads. And we got over that. We got registration; we got government-funded courses and all the trappings that go with that recognition, government recognition. There was another pivotal point, and that was in the early 90s with the publication of the RAND report on the appropriateness of spinal manipulation for the treatment of low back pain.

**KINSLER** Sure.

**REGGARS** In Australia, I saw this publication as the catalyst for the push for evidence-based practice.

**KINSLER** As we did in the States.

**REGGARS** Yeah, well we now had some good scientific research to suggest that, at least for acute low back pain, spinal manipulation seemed to work.

**KINSLER** And it was outside, third party research as well.

**REGGARS** Yeah, exactly, exactly. So this was a crossroads. So what do we do

now? Do we continue down the road of the pseudo-religious dogma associated with chiropractic philosophy and the VSC, or do we take the road to science? Around that time I make mention of the first reference to chiropractic at the crossroads, and that was a conference called the COMIG Conference which was – I'll bore you with the full title which was The Chiropractors and Osteopaths Musculoskeletal Interest Group - that's an offshoot of the Chiropractic and Osteopathic College of Australasia, COCA - and they held their first conference in Melbourne. An opening address was given by a sociologist with an interest in health policy instruction [inaudible] Ed Willis, and his address was entitled 'Chiropractic and Osteopathy at the Crossroad'. His opinion was, at that stage, that in order for the profession to progress and be more widely accepted by the public and others they had to develop a strong research culture and do it quickly - patient testimonials had long ceased to be effective in persuading, and that chiropractic could not continue down the same road as previously and expect it to serve them well as it has been the case in the past. And this is important, the increasingly informed consumer, or indeed the public and government wishing to scrutinise every cent of public expenditure, is the name of the game. Seeking to build bridges with other practitioners interested in musculoskeletal medicine is an important objective.

**KINSLER** That's good advice.

**REGGARS** Well, 10 years later Meeker and Haldeman discussed the very same dilemma [inaudible] ...abandon the alternative tag and become fully integrated into mainstream health. I'll quote from their paper: "...that the next decade should determine whether chiropractic maintains the trappings of alternative healthcare profession or becomes fully integrated into all healthcare systems. Its future healthcare role will probably be determined by its commitment to interdisciplinary cooperation and science based practices". Exactly the same recommendation from Willis 10 years earlier. And where have we got? We're just going round the same circles.

**KINSLER** And so do you feel like Australian chiropractors failed to heed this early warning, and then again when they got a present warning, they failed to heed the same advice?

**REGGARS** Some have and some haven't. I mean...and this is the problem. It just appears that those that adopted an evidence-based practice model, like myself and many of my colleagues, have walked down that science road. The others have just abandoned it, and just done a full circle and gone back to their basic chiropractic philosophy tenets. I mean, the CAA around that time also contrived their mission statement and core values. Now the core values include that "subluxations compromise expression of Innate Intelligence" and that "prevention and removal of subluxations will facilitate the expression of optimal health". I mean, that [inaudible] dogma has no place in healthcare. How can we expect to gain the respect and attempt to integrate ourselves into mainstream healthcare when we talk a language of gobbledegook that has its roots in nineteenth century pseudo-religion?

**KINSLER** Is that dogma still being taught in the chiropractic schools in Australia?

**REGGARS** It's difficult for me to say categorically that that's the case, but I can say that there's three universities in Australia. To my knowledge, only one talks about Vertebral Subluxation dogma in anything other than an historical perspective and that's RMIT University. As I said, this was the first government-funded program in the world. In my opinion, it was as good as any chiropractic

program in the world. In recent years they seem to have adopted a more subluxation base to their teaching. Their website quotes: "Functional derangement of the spine and other articulations may occur; where spinal we call this a Vertebral Subluxation Complex. Such derangements may affect the functioning of the neurological system in a variety of ways through a variety of mechanisms; we see such altered function as ranging from the Newtonian and quantifiable findings of pain and altered sensation to the quantum and qualitative findings of altered cognitive and affective dimensions." When you work out what that means can you let me know? I mean, the former head of that particular program, Phillip Ebrall, also has written about the VCS in the *Chiropractic Journal of Australia* –a couple of papers – and one in particular on how it should be taught to students. In the paper he talks about the need to teach something that does not exist. He writes: "Inspired by a trip to Disneyland this paper explores the challenges associated with the need to teach something that may not exist. It reports lessons learned by viewing a successful commercial illusion that has capacity to inform a pedagogical approach to abstract objects." As I point out in the paper, what's the point of teaching something that doesn't exist, and is it just a successful commercial illusion? I'm sure to many it's been most profitable.

**KINSLER** Yeah, it's a trip to Fantasy Land. That's unbelievable. And he's an administrator at the College?

**REGGARS** He was the head of the School of Chiropractic.

**KINSLER** Head of the School of Chiropractic? Fantastic.

**REGGARS** And we have to contrast it with the recent developments in the UK over the Simon Singh libel case with the British Chiropractic Association.

**KINSLER** Sure.

**REGGARS** The UK's General Chiropractic Council, which is their licensing board, investigated the teaching of the Vertebral Subluxation Complex with the three chiropractic programs and none of them taught the VSC in anything other than an historical sense. They issued a position statement saying that: "The chiropractic Vertebral Subluxation Complex is an historical concept and it remains a theoretical model. It is not supported by any clinical research evidence that will allow a claim to be made that it is the cause of disease or health concerns." Strange on that point the British Chiropractic Association issued a joint statement at that point in time as well and said that "for many years the BCA has not supported the concept of the Vertebral Subluxation Complex", which I thought was very interesting.

**KINSLER** It is interesting, and unfortunately the history of the Singh case wasn't quite so succinct in dealing with the concept of vertebral subluxation. I think that the BCA had some mis-steps along the way, to put it gently.

**REGGARS** Well, with respect to the teaching of subluxation at colleges here, I think it's worthwhile noting that the CAA developed a strategic plan in 2006, and one of the recommendations of that plan was that they should work with teaching institutions to ensure that chiropractic programs were aligned with their core values relating to VSC. So it would appear that their attempts have been successful at at least one university. And as you may know, just recently there's been some more problems in Australia with a health activist calling for the closure of a paediatric clinic at RMIT University.

**KINSLER** Yeah, and speaking of Simon Singh I believe that he was involved in at least backing that activist.

**REGGARS** Yes, yes, and she recruited some very high profile medical educators and professionals to also support her claim. My understanding is that a letter was sent to the Federal Minister for Health here by a health reform activist and she was apparently from the sceptics' association, was awarded the Skeptic Of The Year prize last year, or the year before, and someone had brought to her attention the treatment of children for conditions such as enuresis, colic, ADHD, autism, etc. And she made some investigations, found that there was no evidence to support the treatment of those particular conditions, and the college's journal, which is now called *Chiropractic & Manual Therapies*, published - or did actually an issue on paediatric chiropractic - and the systematic review which came out, which was published in that particular issue, basically said that there was no evidence to support the use of chiropractic for those particular conditions. So, as a result of her letter, which she enlisted one of chiropractic's biggest adversaries, Edzard Ernst, as well as a number of quite high profile medical professionals in Australia and researchers...with this letter to the minister basically denouncing chiropractic treatment of children and that the RMIT clinic, paediatric clinic, should be closed until investigated.

**KINSLER** I have to sidetrack just a little. I'm wondering how that conversation went with the woman who won Skeptic Of The Year, if they called her up and said, "Hey, congratulations, you won Skeptic Of The Year", and she went, "No, no, I don't think so"... I mean that was probably a pretty tough thing for her to accept. Is that paediatric clinic at RMIT, are they promoting anti-vaccination views?

**REGGARS** I can't say yes or no. I don't know. All I can say is that RMIT University seems to have a strong influence from the CAA. There is a group in Australia called the Australian Vaccination Network, which is an anti-vaccination organisation. The current President of the CAA is a member, as well as several other officials of the CAA. This particular group, we had - in one of the states there's a Health Services Complaints Commission which look at complaints against all registered health professionals and unregistered professions as well - but they actually forced this group to put a disclaimer on their website that the information that was supplied was misleading and often false. We have chiropractors in Sydney who run anti-vaccination talks to the general public.

**KINSLER** Last I looked there were 120 chiropractors that were linked to that Australian Vaccination Network website.

**REGGARS** My rough figures show that there are about 180 odd health professionals as members, and of those 180, 130 are chiropractors. These particular chiropractors that run these anti-vaccination talks think that the Wakefield study was a good scientific study and that he's been misrepresented. So we have this very strong position within the profession of anti-vaccination. We know from research that's been published that chiropractors often initiate talks about vaccination with their patients, have anti-vaccination literature in their waiting rooms. Now I've got nothing against the freedom of choice...

**KINSLER** Right...

**REGGARS** ....what I firmly believe is it should be an informed choice.

**KINSLER** Right.

**REGGARS** When people present evidence that's not credible, distorted, misuse it the same as we talked about with chiropractic evidence, that's what I have an issue with. If someone said, look here's the pros and the cons of vaccination in an unbiased informative manner, and let the individual make their choice, I'm happy with that. Now the RMIT University paediatric clinic - as I say, I can't say that they teach anti-vaccination - but all I can say is that the CAA has a strong anti-vaccination platform.

**KINSLER** One of the accusations is that chiropractors shouldn't ever be treating children. Do you feel that way?

**REGGARS** No. Chiropractic has a place in treating some musculoskeletal conditions in children, no question about that. We get the results. But it's when we start to treat ADHD, asthma, colic, all these other conditions - which the vast majority of them are shown to have good results with chiropractic - have a very favourable natural history. That's where I have issues. I mean... you know, as we look at the evidence for certain conditions, certain paediatric conditions, colic is always (inaudible). We had good scientific evidence to support colic. Well, we haven't. The only decent study that was done was a randomised control trial where the mother was blinded from what... the intervention where the baby was either given chiropractic manipulation, which I think in this case was just a finger pressure to the upper cervical complex - a finger pressure - now that's certainly more (inaudible) ...the hands than cervical manipulation, or the baby was unwrapped and then re-wrapped by a nurse. There was no difference between... in the results. So I had issues. Mothers, fathers, are anxious about their children's health. They come to a registered health practitioner who's done five years of study, and then that practitioner says well, you know, I can treat this baby's ADHD, whatever it may be, with spinal manipulation when there's no research to support it. All the research that's there is against it. I think it's wrong. Haldeman said in a commentary on that review of manual therapies by [name unclear] that it's wrong to treat conditions with unsupported treatments when there are treatments out there that have support ...

**KINSLER** It's also unnecessary to try and focus on so many different health conditions when there are health conditions that we do extremely well with.

**REGGARS** Exactly, and if we... and that's... I think that, again, that's the future for us. If we concentrate on the things that we do well.

**KINSLER** Like spine care.

**REGGARS** Like spine care, you know, where we have... we have some evidence to support what we do. We haven't got evidence for this other garbage.

**KINSLER** Right.

**REGGARS** That's... that's where we fall short, and that's where the future of the profession lies - in focusing on what we do, and what we do best.

**KINSLER** What state is that in now, that paediatric clinic at RMIT?

**REGGARS** I understand that there've been responses from the University. Officials responses from the Vice Chancellor saying that the University stands by its position that it teaches an evidence-based course. I believe that there's still some pushing and shoving going on and there's probably going to be some further media releases because I think this particular activist is... well, she had

made representations to the Minister for Health, and I'm not sure where that's happened, but I understand she's also written to the University again asking for a further explanation. I mean, you can't always believe everything you read in the papers, but the University was quoted in a magazine that asked about its position - RMIT dismissed the claims it was teaching potentially harmful theories and techniques – this is all about paediatrics, by the way –

**KINSLER** Right.

**REGGARS** When asked for details of conditions treated at its clinic basically said, "we do not aim to treat conditions, we look at the biomechanical situation for an individual and make the appropriate gentle adjustments. This can improve the situations in other parts of the patient's health, but RMIT is not claiming a direct cause". You know, that to me smacks of 1900, early 1900s defence for chiropractors when they were charged with practicing medicine - we don't treat conditions, all we treat is subluxations. And unfortunately we still have those in our profession that do exactly the same thing. I mean, I was at one stage also President of the Registration Board here in the state of Victoria, which is the licensing board. While I was President we had a... I had a case that involved a four-and-a-half- week infant. Well, the mother took the child to a chiropractor after she saw an ad offering a discounted initial consultation. The chiropractor stated in his advertising that the whole purpose of his examination was to locate and correct subluxations. So, after the examination in which he used thermography, the chiropractor was using legitimate diagnostic equipment inappropriately, he got the mother to sign up for a 60-visit, 12-month treatment plan. This particular chiropractor was a follower of C J Mertz's 'Waiting List Practice', who I'm sure you're familiar with as well.

**KINSLER** Absolutely. Also somebody else who's never going to sponsor my podcast. We'll just add him to the list.

**REGGARS** Oh well...thank you for sending him over here. Although this case is, you know, disturbing in itself and could even illustrate how subluxation dogma can lead to unprofessional conduct, the most disturbing fact about it is that this guy, this chiropractor in his defence had several of his peers and even (inaudible) Matthew McCoy from the US as a defence witness. Interestingly, McCoy's testimony was discounted by the presiding members of the tribunal who thought McCoy was a partisan witness and just committed to defending the practices of subluxation-based chiropractors.

**KINSLER** Shocking.

**REGGARS** You know, we have chiropractors advertising silent deadly killers, and spinal decay, and advertising... getting lifetime chiropractic care. In 2006 – digressing a bit – but in 2006 the Australian Readers Digest published a poll similar to the Gallup polls that have been published in the States. Chiropractors were placed 13<sup>th</sup> on the list of 30 professions. We were 10<sup>th</sup> out of psychics, ministers of religion, car salesmen, politicians...but the public seems to trust hairdressers more than us, so...

**KINSLER** Do we beat out the used car salesmen?

**REGGARS** Yeah, we beat the used car salesmen.

**KINSLER** Oh good...

**REGGARS** I mean...

**KINSLER** ...that's really the benchmark that I look for.

**REGGARS** You know, I got to... what's wrong with this picture. What's wrong with [inaudible]? I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take it any more.

**KINSLER** Should we point fingers somewhere? I mean, is there someone we should be blaming for the current state of affairs?

**REGGARS** Well, I think the profession itself has a lot to answer for, you know. And I think we're at fault because we haven't established that cultural authority strong enough to control the radical element of the profession. We hold ourselves up to ridicule and in many ways the profession deserves every criticism we get. Ten years ago, and I like this quote from JC Smith: "Why do we tolerate the charlatans, hucksters, profiteers, and wild-eyed 'philosophers' who taint our profession's image, who obstruct political unity and espouse untrue science that cannot withstand the test of research; who recruit patients with gimmicks, and who mislead naive students and young practitioners with dogma and promises of great wealth? Is it because the profession ethics is mostly lacking in chiropractic? Is it due to a laissez faire attitude within chiropractic where anyone says anything under the guise of 'philosophy'? Or is mainstream chiropractic simply too scared to confront these fringe elements, fearful of litigation or argument. Have we become a profession ruled by a vocal minority (the Ouija board practitioners), hell-bent on keeping our profession in the past with dogma dominating over science, with leaders who espouse anti-scientific rhetoric, with practitioners who give free spinal exams and \$10 office visits, all the while masquerading as 'principled' chiropractors who preach unproved health gospel? Is this characterisation wrong, or painfully accurate? You tell me." So, in my opinion nothing's changed in the past 10 years. No other health profession would tolerate this behaviour.

**KINSLER** Is chiropractic in Australia doomed, or can it change?

**REGGARS** It would have to change. I think one hope is that the regulatory body may do something. They need to fill their primary mandate - and that's the protection of the public - and prosecute those that transgress. Unfortunately, or fortunately, we made the change in the way our licensing processes. We used to have individual state licensing boards, now we have a national board and that's only been in existence for just over 12 months and they're finding their feet, but I'm hopeful that they will maybe adopt the UK's regulatory body's approach and start with a position statement on subluxation. But I've got to say, I also hold myself somewhat responsible for the current state of chiropractic in Australia. I was a member of the CAA and on the State Executive in the late 80s and early 90s. I, like many of my contemporaries, resigned when the CAA released its mission statement with core values relating to the Vertebral Subluxation Complex. I was encouraged by some of the executives to withdraw my resignation and basically assured that those who dominated the profession at that time would (inaudible) ...saying that if I and my colleagues wanted to change all we'd have to do was wait. Well, in retrospect I think all we did by resigning was to give the subluxationists in the profession a stronger foot up and now we're suffering the consequences. But to answer that question, if we don't do something now there's only one way and that's backwards. Just recently, like this week, there was a report in the NHMRC, which is similar to the NIH in the states, where they're putting a position statement out on homeopathy. They declare it unethical because it's no better than placebo. I think if chiropractic persists with this VSC nonsense it won't be too long before we're going to be put on the same list. I mean, at the end of the day we either move forward - if we

stay in the same position as we are now we're... we hold ourselves up to ridicule, we will be put in the quack bit, we will lose all the privileges and rights that we've gained over the last 30 years, and we'll just become an alternate fringe profession, and I'm sure some will be happy with that, but I'm not one of them.

**KINSLER** So the alternate future that you would like to see?

**REGGARS** Well, I believe we still have an opportunity. We can still have a place in mainstream healthcare because we have a lot to offer with respect to spine care. We could be as others have suggested - Nelson and Murphy have suggested in different papers – that we could become non-surgical spine specialists. I think you feature a couple of these articles on your website. But the time to achieve this is rapidly diminishing. We need to act now. Willis in that 1992 address said we need inter-professional collaboration and research. Well, we're doing some of the research, but how can we have inter-professional collaboration when our language is one of pseudo-religious ideological dogma?

**KINSLER** So what do you recommend the individual chiropractor, who may not be involved in research, what do you recommend that they do in order to help advance the profession?

**REGGARS** I think the silent majority that's been talked about, and people who share my views, open up their windows, shout out loud "I'm as mad as hell, I'm not going to take this anymore". Maybe if there's a collective voice that's loud and strong we may have this chance to survive and prosper. Otherwise I think we're doomed.

**KINSLER** What does that mean as far as reporting colleagues?

**REGGARS** Yes, it starts with reporting colleagues. There's been this culture within the chiropractic profession, and I'm not sure whether it is the same in other professions, where people are reluctant to report colleagues for misbehaviour. We now have mandatory reporting under this new government national Act, but that only goes as far as for sexual abuse and whether the practitioner is mentally and physically impaired. But professional transgressions such as poor... you know, false and misleading advertising, over-servicing, come to our attention all the time because patients come to us and they say, "you know. I went to Joe Blog. He's recommended I come back every day for the next six weeks and then thereafter three times a week etc, etc, etc." And most chiropractors just say, "hmmm, OK, well I'm not going to do that, but I'll do something different", but fail to either encourage the patient to lodge a complaint or lodge a complaint that (inaudible) ...if they're aware of unprofessional conduct. So I think this is this cultural authority that others have spoken about that we need to establish within the profession. The culture authority that will permit us to stand up and be counted and say look, I'm as mad as hell, I'm not going to take this anymore.

**KINSLER** John Reggars, a voice of reason in the Australian wilderness, thank you so much for joining us on *On the other Hand* today.

**REGGARS** Thank you, Brett.

*"I don't have to tell you things are bad, everybody knows things are bad. I want you to get mad. I don't want you to protest, I don't want you to write. I don't want you to write to your congressman because I wouldn't know what to tell you to write. I don't know what to do about the*

*Depression, and the inflation, and the Russians and the crime in the street. All I know is that first you've got to get mad. You've got to say I'm a human being goddammit. My life has value. So I want you to get up now. I want all of you to get up out of your chairs. I want you to get up right now, and go to the window, open it, and stick your head out and yell: I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore."*

#### **KINSLER POSTSCRIPT:**

I was surprised to learn how similar chiropractic in Australia is to many parts of the United States and the rest of the world. Fundamentalist subluxation-based chiropractors see their profession as a comprehensive and unique system of healthcare, and unfortunately they often practice more pseudoscience than science, more religion than actual remedy, and though this type of chiropractor may be more comfortable in faith-based company, they want to integrate into mainstream healthcare to garner the credibility and benefits that come along with that acceptance. I don't think you can have it both ways. To work within a scientific paradigm you have to embrace the science. To be the only astrologer in a room full of astronomers might be entertaining for a while, but at some point the real scientists will tire of the mysticism and want to see something actually somewhat sciency. The profession is not unscientific, but there are a heck of a lot of people in chiropractic who are content to tolerate the pseudoscience around them and not question it. It's time for the fence-sitters to get off the fence, join a State, national, or worldwide organisation, steer it in the right direction, take it over if you have to, get involved in regulation or education, and throw out the people who ignore the science, ignore evidence, and ignore logic. And if you have colleagues who are violating public health, or the public trust, for God's sake speak up. Thanks to my guest Dr John Reggars for his insight and courage in speaking out against ideological dogma in Australia.