

Congratulations Dr. Joe Stevens of North Liberty, IA-New Gonstead Fellow!

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The Foundation of the Gonstead System

By: Joe Stevens, DC, ACP, DPhCS, GCSS Fellow

Abstract: When evaluating the future of our profession and the future of Gonstead chiropractic, we are left pondering the words that Dr. Gonstead had for us: "Our future will be our results". Decades after his passing we are still striving to achieve the results that Dr. Gonstead achieved. What are we as a community of Gonstead chiropractors missing when it comes to reaching that standard and how can we help the next generation elevate Gonstead chiropractic to a higher level? It is important to examine

the work of Dr. Gonstead at a foundational level if we are to consistently achieve the results needed to move our profession forward.

Dr. Clarence Gonstead elevated chiropractic to a high level throughout his years of practice and he set the standard for all chiropractors to follow. Decades after his passing, we are still striving to reach that standard, not only with his success in practice and his influence, but in achieving the results in patient care that he was able to achieve on a very consistent basis. His greatness did not stem from a physical ability to adjust that others do not possess, but rather from his thought process and how he viewed the body and how he viewed health. That is truly what set him apart and left us with giant footsteps to follow. It was the chiropractic mindset that Dr. Gonstead possessed that truly set the foundation for the Gonstead System.

As we strive to follow those footsteps and as we pursue a path that leads us to the same level of results that he achieved, it is important that we form the same foundational understanding of chiropractic that Dr. Gonstead had from the beginning. He used that foundational understanding that he used to grow chiropractic and develop the Gonstead system of adjusting. It was Dr. Gonstead's mind that truly set him apart. Gonstead learned chiropractic and the philosophy behind chiropractic from those tasked with developing and helping to define our profession. Dr. Clarence Gonstead started with a foundation of understanding that he built upon, and he used that to drive our profession forward. He got results on a consistent basis that we strive to achieve even a few times in our entire careers. His greatness when it came to achieving results with patient care was and is unmatched and he stated that "our future will be our results". The truth is, however, that chiropractors that are not specific can even get results sometimes. In reality, it is consistent results will be our future! That is the thing that the Gonstead System must achieve as we grow going forward.

When a Gonstead Chiropractor provides care to a patient, they cannot jump straight to the adjustment without using proper analysis to give direction on where to adjust. A chiropractor could have perfect technique delivering an adjustive thrust in a cervical chair but without a complete Gonstead analysis leading the chiropractor to a major subluxation

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where the thrust is to be delivered, it is not a Gonstead adjustment. We do not skip steps in the Gonstead system. We cannot skip steps when it comes to understanding the why behind what we do either. If we do not understand chiropractic and its philosophy, and if we do not strive to have the high level of chiropractic understanding that Dr. Gonstead had, we cannot perform the Gonstead analysis to the degree that is needed to achieve consistent results. If we start with the analysis as our starting point, we are skipping a foundational step in care. Our Chiropractic Philosophy teaches us what Innate Intelligence is and with that understanding, it gives us details into the understanding of a vertebral subluxation that becomes vital if we are going to find the major subluxation on a consistent basis. It also lays out our role as chiropractors. For the young chiropractor, this is an important piece to grasp if they are to be successful. A chiropractor can have every tool that the Gonstead system has to offer, and they can have the physical skills to make an adjustment, but if they do not have the understanding of how to use those tools and skills they will reach the level of results that are necessary to drive Gonstead chiropractic forward.

Dr. Gonstead talked many times about finding the major. When it comes to finding the major subluxation on a consistent basis and aiming to help achieve the clinical results that Dr. Gonstead was able to achieve, we must understand the details of the vertebral subluxation and we must have not only the tools, but the understanding to identify which is the major. To find the underlying problem in clinical care consistently we must have the roadmap of what we are looking for as well as an analysis that is detailed enough to provide us with the objective data to identify the major problem, i.e. the major subluxation. Our philosophy gives us that road map and Dr. Gonstead took that road map and gave it even more detail to give us clarity. When that fundamental piece is missing from the equation, the chiropractor is left with information but not the level of understanding to apply it on the level necessary to get the results that Dr. Gonstead did. We often lack the understanding and the focus to be detailed enough to find the major. Not just sometimes, but every time.

Dr. Gary Pennebaker, a GCSS Fellow and a mentor to many, often gave the example of having three Gonstead chiropractors. Each with the same skills and the same tools at their disposal. One adjusted 1-2 segments, one adjusted 3-4 segments and one adjusted 5 or more. He claimed that only one was truly practicing chiropractic. His point was not that we need to be caught up on the exact number of segments that are to be adjusted on a visit as each person is unique and should be viewed on a case-by-case basis. The point he was making is that only one of these chiropractors was really focused on finding the major. It was that advanced level of understanding and that level of focus that sets the Gonstead chiropractor apart.

We see this issue show itself when looking at the success of young Gonstead chiropractors today. Not only did they not learn chiropractic from the philosophical greats that Dr. Gonstead did, but they did not even learn chiropractic at the level that it was taught 20-30 years ago. It is very easy for the young chiropractor to get caught up in learning the details of what they need to do and how they need to do it that they miss exploring why they are doing it. Unless they pursue learning chiropractic on their own, they do not have the foundation to stand on that the chiropractors that came before them did. When you miss the first step in an equation, the results suffer. This is not only evident in patient care, but it becomes clear when looking at their success in practice. When a patient walks into a chiropractor's office, it is easy to fall into the trap of trying to please the patient by targeting only their subjective symptoms, after all, that is what we are taught in school. As Gonstead chiropractors, we know our goal is to not only improve the symptoms of the patient but to improve function in how we address the structure of their spine and the overall function of their nervous system. When the "why" isn't understood, and the goal shifts to symptom relief and pleasing the patient. It takes clinical care in a different direction. When this occurs, the chiropractor no longer maintains the focus on the objective changes showing healing and adaptability. The chiropractor also loses sight of the fact that true healing takes time (which is one of our philosophical principles). When symptomatology is the goal and the symptoms do not change in a short period of time, we see the chiropractor reaching for other things to try to change the symptoms. This is where we see so many young

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Gonstead chiropractors looking for things outside of Gonstead chiropractic. They get distracted and directed towards the wrong direction, and many do not recover. Dr. Gonstead said “Remember that chiropractic always works. When it does not seem to, examine your application, but do not question the principle”. Too many young chiropractors do not know the principle well enough to drive them to question the application. We see more inexperienced Gonstead doctors adding things into their practice because they do not think that the Gonstead system is enough. We see too many of them leaving, pursuing different techniques with bigger personalities in leadership because they are chasing something they didn’t grasp well in the first place. We see too many of our young chiropractors who possess a high level of potential failing in their practices or in the way that they practice.

We have to make it a priority to teach Gonstead chiropractic from the foundation up so that the next generation of chiropractors develops a deep understanding of chiropractic, and the thought process required to be a Gonstead chiropractor. We need to recognize the gaps that they have in their education and their understanding of chiropractic if we are to see them be successful. We are seeing an increase in interest in learning Gonstead chiropractic, but we cannot just teach them the adjusting technique and trust that they will practice in the same way that gets them the high level of results that they are capable in helping patients achieve. We must work to help develop Gonstead chiropractors that understand chiropractic and more specifically Gonstead chiropractic from a foundational level.

In chiropractic, we should not choose which system of adjusting to use based upon what looks good or what we think will look the best to patients. The Gonstead system isn’t the easiest or the quickest system to learn. By choosing this system, we are all driven by something more than what is easy. We must choose how we apply the art of chiropractic based upon the philosophy. It is designed to be that way. Once we understand chiropractic well, then we choose a system to use to apply chiropractic in a clinical setting that is congruent with what chiropractic is. When it comes to having the tools to identify all components of a major subluxation and having the specificity required to adjust that subluxation on consistent basis, the Gonstead system is the most complete full spine system available. When we understand the whole picture, that is where we gain conviction in what we do. That is extremely important for young chiropractors as they navigate the first years in practice. Entering practice in the environment that we are in isn’t easy. We see far too many young Gonstead chiropractors falter when things get tough. Having conviction in what you do in order to push through during those tough times is what can get you through to the point of being successful. Without that foundational understanding of chiropractic, we do not get results on a consistent enough basis to build a practice, and young chiropractors often get lost chasing symptoms or patient satisfaction, both of which can lead away from the Gonstead system when the stresses of practice come into play.

Dr. Gonstead changed the landscape of chiropractic by building upon the foundation that he was taught and by understanding chiropractic at a greater level. We owe the next generation of chiropractors to teach them the whole picture of Gonstead chiropractic. One day, their consistent results will be our future. ✨

About the Author:

Joseph Stevens, DC, ACP, DPhCS, GCSS Fellow has been in private practice since 2012 in North Liberty, IA. Dr. Stevens graduated with his Doctor of Chiropractic degree from Northwestern Health Sciences University in 2011. That same year he received his certification from the Academy of Chiropractic Philosophers through Sherman College of Chiropractic. He became an instructor for the Gonstead Methodology Institute in July of 2012. Dr. Stevens became a Gonstead Diplomate through the Gonstead Clinical Studies Society in 2015. In 2016 he became a Philosophy Diplomate (DPhCS) through the International Chiropractors Association. He served on the board of the ICA’s Council on Chiropractic Philosophy from 2018-2023 and was the board president from 2021-2023. In 2024, Dr. Stevens was accepted into the Gonstead College of Fellows. Dr. Stevens is dedicated to helping develop the next generation of Gonstead chiropractors and aims to help chiropractors develop a stronger foundational understanding of chiropractic and it’s philosophy. ✨