

Establishing Chiropractic Education in Hong Kong: A report of perceived advantages, challenges, and strategies for success

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Narrative: As demand for complementary and alternative medicine rises globally, introducing Chiropractic education in Hong Kong provides an opportunity to meet growing healthcare needs. This paper reports developments in Hong Kong, China and notes the challenges, regulatory barriers, limited public awareness of chiropractic care, competition from other healthcare professions, and constraints on funding and resources.

I report strategies used by the successful group which has established the Hong Kong College of Chiropractic in Hong Kong, China in collaboration with the McTimoney College of Chiropractic of the UK, and note other Western institutions which were eager but not successful.

Successful private chiropractic programs in New Zealand (NZCC) and Australia (ACC) have provided valuable examples to emulate. It is noted that over half the world's population now live in the region of which Hong Kong is an international city and looking to become a hub of Chiropractic education and Research.

Indexing Terms: Chiropractic; education; Hong Kong.

Introduction

Chiropractic education is a 21st Century growth industry and one in which I am involved, particularly in the East Asia region. I have been active since the early 1990s in countries such as Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines. In the distant past I worked on behalf of *RMIT University* seeking to establish programs in Hong Kong and Singapore.

The Malaysian program has reached maturity with the *International Medical University* in Kuala Lumpur, the South Korean program seems to have languished, the Japan program is in transition, and the Philippines is about to commence a full 6-year university-based program with Government accreditation.

The news of a program commencing in Hong Kong intrigued me as I am somewhat aware of the challenges involved. I had also heard unfortunate suggestions that it should not happen. On inquiring further it seems to me that there was a strongly emerging contemporary approach to the provision of Chiropractic services in Hong Kong, set against the continuance of what could kindly

... persistence from younger graduates has overcome resistance from older, established Chiropractors in Hong Kong to establish a new College of Chiropractic Education ...'



be called '*traditional British models of practice*'. My sources suggested these older practitioners were less than supportive of a program of Chiropractic Education being established in Hong Kong and suggestions such a program would be accredited outside the assumed 'territory' of the *Council on Chiropractic Education Australasia* (CCEA) present an opportunity to investigate and report.

This paper is the outcome of my inquiries and represents the inputs to me of number of sources which will remain confidential, bearing in mind there are at least 2 camps of strong opinion in Hong Kong which, as is usual within the Chiropractic profession, are not necessarily in agreement.

My starting point was to understand how Chiropractors in Hong Kong viewed Chiropractic Education.

A view of Chiropractic education

The younger Chiropractors in Hong Kong, China are keenly aware that Chiropractic education has experienced significant growth and development over the past century, with the profession gaining recognition and prominence in many countries around the world. (1) They recognise that the roots of chiropractic education can be traced back to the establishment of the *Palmer School of Chiropractic* in Davenport, Iowa, in 1897 by DD Palmer. (2) Since then, the profession has expanded globally, with accredited chiropractic programs now available in 18 countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia, Europe, and Asia. (3) As the demand for complementary and alternative medicine continues to increase, (4) they see a growing need for qualified Chiropractic practitioners to meet the healthcare needs of diverse populations.

The rationale of the group advancing the establishment of a College is that by establishing the first Chiropractic program in Hong Kong it would not only contribute to addressing the local population's healthcare needs but also serve as a catalyst for the growth and development of the profession in the region.

All informants appreciated the advantages, challenges, and strategies for success in establishing the first Chiropractic education program in Hong Kong, China, and I report my summation of their views here. I aim to provide insights and guidance for stakeholders invested in the successful development of Chiropractic programs in Asia.

The informants were candid about the challenges that may arise during the process, including regulatory and administrative barriers, limited public awareness and acceptance of Chiropractic care, competition with other healthcare professions and educational institutions, and financial constraints. They also proposed strategies to ensure the successful establishment of a Chiropractic program, focused on developing a comprehensive curriculum, collaborating with various stakeholders, addressing regulatory and administrative challenges, enhancing public awareness and acceptance of chiropractic care, and securing financial and resource support.

It was hoped by all that this report would provide a case study and examples of successful Chiropractic education programs in other regions to serve as a model for Hong Kong.

The perceived advantages

In Hong Kong, the demand for chiropractic services has been on the rise. (5) The ageing population, (6) increasing patient expectations, increasing financial burden, a lack of clinicians, and technological advancement (7) contribute to an increased healthcare transformation for non-invasive and drug-free healthcare options like chiropractic care. Furthermore, the growing awareness of the benefits of chiropractic care for spinal and musculoskeletal health (8) has led to an increased demand for qualified chiropractic physicians in the region. It was strongly argued that establishing chiropractic education programs in Hong Kong would help to meet this demand and provide a new career path for aspiring healthcare professionals.

In all communication with me it was emphasised that by integrating Chiropractic care into Hong Kong's healthcare system the participants could help alleviate the burden on the primary care system by offering an additional option for managing musculoskeletal pain and dysfunction. (9) This is a noble driver for a Hong-Kong based Chiropractic program.

Research has shown that Chiropractic care can be effective in managing spinal pain and severe adverse events are very rare. (10) It is envisioned that the Chiropractic college would act as a tertiary institution by establishing standards and policies that specify objective standards such as sick leave guidelines, reducing conflicts between employers, insurers, and chiropractors. (11) It was accepted that by training competent Chiropractors in Hong Kong, the local healthcare system would benefit from a wider range of treatment options for patients suffering from musculoskeletal conditions.

An alert

However the idea of the potential for any tertiary institution to become involved in any way with standards and policies seemed to be a trigger of negativity from one group, particularly those whom I perceived as being 'the old school' of the traditional colonial model of Chiropractic in Hong Kong. To me, this was a replication of the selfish forces involved in Australia within the then *Chiropractors Association of Australia* (CAA), the 'old school' who reacted to prevent the introduction of the *Clinical Parameters of Australian Chiropractic Practice* in 1997/98.

Similar self-centred attitudes are again in evidence as the Chiropractic profession in Australia, through different avenues, seeks to identify a *Scope of Practice*. It seems to me, as a biased observer, that established Chiropractors outside the restrictive confines of Northern America, are protective of their imagined freedom to practice as they wish without new Chiropractors proposing standards and related behaviours suited to mainstream health care. This is a dreadful divide within the profession.

The 'old school' have little care about the fact that establishing a Chiropractic education program in Hong Kong would create opportunities for international collaborations and partnerships. By default, this would bring new approaches to practice and new collaborative standards to the region.

By working with established Chiropractic institutions and organisations, such as the new *Hong Kong College of Chiropractic*, Hong Kong's chiropractic program at that college could benefit from global expertise and resources. These collaborations could also facilitate research partnerships and contribute to the advancement of Chiropractic knowledge and evidence-based practice in the region. (12-28). This seems threatening to the old guard.

Moreover, international collaborations would enhance the reputation of Hong Kong as a hub for Chiropractic education and research in Asia given Hong Kong's standing as an international city with a diverse population. This provides an excellent environment for recruiting a diverse student body and faculty for a Chiropractic education program.

The cosmopolitan nature of Hong Kong allows for the exchange of ideas and cultural perspectives, enriching the educational experience for students and faculty alike. (29) Additionally, Hong Kong's proximity to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region could attract students and faculty from neighbouring countries, further enhancing diversity and fostering a vibrant Chiropractic community in the region.

The challenges as presented to me

Establishing a Chiropractic program in Hong Kong, China may face challenges related to the regulatory and administrative aspects of creating a new academic program. Today's Chiropractic college is equivalent to a standard medical college in all pre-clinical subjects. (30) Navigating the local government, educational, and healthcare authorities' policies and procedures is complex and time-consuming. (31) Obtaining necessary accreditations and approvals, as well as developing a curriculum that meets the local and international standards, poses significant challenges.

It is crucial for stakeholders to be well-versed in the local regulatory environment and foster relationships with relevant authorities to overcome these barriers.

Despite the growing demand for Chiropractic services, the profession faces a low public awareness, (32) competition with other professions, political uncertainty, and costs of education. (33) Misconceptions about the safety, efficacy, and scope of chiropractic practice may hinder the development and success of a Chiropractic program. Addressing these misconceptions and promoting the benefits of Chiropractic care through public education campaigns, research

dissemination, and collaboration with other healthcare professionals is essential to increase awareness and acceptance of Chiropractic care in the region. (34)

Hong Kong is marketed as '*Asia's World City*' because of its connectivity, geopolitical orientation toward East and West, and population mix of migrants from both Asian and non-Asian nations. (35) As a result, a new chiropractic education program may face competition for students, faculty, and resources. Additionally, the chiropractic program will need to differentiate itself from other healthcare professions, such as physiotherapy and traditional Chinese medicine, which are already well-established in Hong Kong's healthcare landscape. (11)

Developing a unique selling proposition, highlighting the distinct advantages of Chiropractic care and education, and demonstrating the program's ability to produce competent and employable graduates will be crucial for any new program to gain a competitive edge in the market.

Establishing a Chiropractic education program also requires significant financial and resource investments. These may include the costs of developing a curriculum, hiring and retaining qualified faculty, securing a suitable facility, and obtaining necessary equipment and learning resources. Securing funding and resources in a competitive educational landscape can be challenging, particularly for a new and relatively unknown program. Stakeholders must explore various funding sources, including governmental support, private investments, and partnerships with established chiropractic institutions, to address financial constraints and resource limitations.

The biggest challenge

In a word it seems to be jealousy. The 'older' group who has had decades to work towards establishing their own program and have made a failed attempt, appears jealous of any new group which makes progress in the matter.

Managing the fallout from manifestations of this envy is also another challenge for the developer of a new Chiropractic program. The obvious aim of a new program is to produce graduates suited for practice in Hong Kong and related areas, which in turn is seen as a threaten to those older practitioners with influence. After years of being comfortable with a stable, non-growth but highly financially successful practice there is a fear of competition.

As an example of how I saw this in action I refer to the venerable *Hong Kong Chiropractic Association* (HKCA) under President Leonard Wong and Vice President Claudia Ng. (36) Despite this organisation being small and relatively inactive since 2018, the their *Public Relations Committee* Chairperson Antonio Wong made a press release to the effect that no local school had yet gained registration, at the same time linking negative consumer news. This seems a blatant attempt to disrupt planning for a new program. The fact these behaviours and press releases are in a Chinese dialect means the Western world, notably the WFC, is not aware of them.

Strategies for success in Hong Kong

For this part of my report I rely on conversations with members of the active group promoting the introduction of a program of Chiropractic education in Hong Kong, China. They feel it is essential to create a comprehensive curriculum that aligns with international standards (36, 37) and aim to achieve this by benchmarking the program against established Chiropractic institutions in other countries and following guidelines from global organisations like the WHO (37) and the *Council on Chiropractic Education International* (CCEI). (36) I appreciate that the WHO standards are from the WFC, and also that the CCEI has little other a good intent for educational quality.

While adhering to international standards, it is also crucial to adapt the curriculum to the local context. (33) This may include incorporating traditional Chinese medicine principles, understanding local health needs, and integrating relevant cultural, social, and language considerations to ensure the program is effective and relevant for students and future practitioners in Hong Kong. (33) With the surge of Chiropractic studies from Hong Kong (HK studies), the incorporation of evidence-based practice and research into the curriculum is vital for fostering a scientific and critical-thinking mindset among students.

This can be achieved by teaching students about the latest local research in Chiropractic care, providing them with opportunities to conduct their own research, and emphasising the importance of integrating research findings into clinical practice. Over recent years, one particular group of private practitioners in Hong Kong has made what I consider a remarkable contribution to the literature, through many papers across many journals, each advancing evidence-based Chiropractic clinical practice and patient management.

The establishing of strong connections with both the local and international Chiropractic communities is essential for the success of a new Chiropractic education program. This can be achieved through membership in professional associations, attending conferences and seminars, and collaborating on research initiatives. Building partnerships with healthcare organisations and educational institutions can help support the growth and development of the Chiropractic program. For example, the *Rubicon Group*, a consortium of Chiropractic educational institutions, has a strategy for the development of new Chiropractic educational programs. (38) These partnerships can lead to opportunities for clinical placements, interdisciplinary collaboration, and shared resources, which can enhance the educational experience for students.

Accreditation and credibility

One key challenge I see in establishing a Chiropractic program in Hong Kong is obtaining recognition from regulatory bodies. Advocacy efforts should focus on highlighting the benefits of chiropractic care, the rigorous standards of Chiropractic education, and the potential for positive impact on public health.

Not only must the program hold high regard in the eyes of authorities in Hong Kong, China, it should also secure accreditation from a recognised international body. This is most important for program in an international city where international students will travel to study and then disperse on graduation. This program's proponents see Chiropractic accreditation as essential for the credibility of the program and portability of graduates. They acknowledge that navigating the accreditation process can be complex, and that it is important to be well-prepared and proactive in addressing any concerns or requirements of the future accrediting body.

To foster greater public awareness and acceptance of Chiropractic care in Hong Kong, it is important to conduct public outreach and educational campaigns like the *World Spine Day*. (39) These initiatives can include hosting workshops, seminars, and community events to educate the public about the benefits of Chiropractic care and dispel any misconceptions. Working with other healthcare providers, such as physicians, physiotherapists, and traditional Chinese medicine practitioners, can help promote Chiropractic care as a valuable and spinal treatment option. (9) This collaboration can lead to increased referrals and a greater understanding of the role of Chiropractic care in the healthcare system.

Funding

Securing funding and resources to establish and maintain a Chiropractic education program can be challenging. Exploring various funding opportunities, such as grants, scholarships, and partnerships with industry sponsors, can help support the program's financial stability. Implementing innovative financial strategies, such as cost-sharing with partner institutions and utilising online learning platforms, can help maximise resources and minimise costs.

The *Chiropractic Doctors Association of Hong Kong* (CDAHK) has established scholarship programs with *Life University* to create synergy in initiating collaboration. (40) Chiropractors at the *New York Medical Group* (NYMG) also created similar scholarships and internships with *McTimoney College of Chiropractic*, *International Medical University*, and *Keiser University* in building future academic talents. (41) Effective resource management, including careful budgeting and regular financial monitoring, is crucial for the long-term sustainability of the chiropractic education program.

Past activity leading to the Hong Kong College of Chiropractic

The New Zealand College of Chiropractic (NZCC), established in 1994, is a prime example of a successful independent chiropractic education program without attachment to a local university. (42) The college was developed by the chiropractors of the *New Zealand Chiropractors' Association* with a strong philosophy. They have maintained a strong focus on evidence-based practice and research, and its graduates are well-regarded both nationally and internationally. (42) Key factors that contributed to the success of NZCC include a comprehensive curriculum that aligns with industrial need, ensuring that students receive a high-quality practical education. The college also has strong collaborations with international chiropractic communities and local healthcare organisations, which have facilitated clinical placements, interdisciplinary research, and shared resources.

The Australian Chiropractic College (ACC), founded in 2018, by a small group including Patrick Sim, then a director of the *Chiropractor's Association of Australia* (National), offers another example of a successful chiropractic education program. (43) The college has quickly registered with the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency* (TEQSA), who are responsible for regulating and assuring the quality of all providers of higher education in Australia. (43) Factors contributing to the success of ACC include developing the curriculum as an independent university, and ensuring that students are prepared to address the healthcare needs through their clinical practice. The College has also engaged with various stakeholders, including the local and international chiropractic communities, healthcare organisations, and educational institutions, which has fostered a supportive environment for the College's growth. Additionally, the ACC has addressed regulatory challenges through a proactive approach to securing accreditation and recognition from relevant bodies.

During the 2010s, several Hong Kong Chiropractors made efforts to establish colleges. In 2013, Henry Chan from *The Hong Kong Chiropractic Association* (HKCA) collaborated with *Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College* (CMCC) and *Hong Kong Baptist University* (HKBU), (44) while in 2015, the *Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology* (RMIT) and HKBU were involved in another effort. (45) Despite initial progress, these partnerships faced numerous challenges, including inadequate project management skills, insufficient funding, a scarcity of teaching talent, and limited engagement with local Chiropractic communities. These obstacles undermined the partnerships' success, eventually leading to their disintegration.

In addition to Chan's endeavours, other organisations also attempted to develop Chiropractic education programs in Hong Kong. In 2011, *China Hong Kong Macao Chiropractic Association* formed a partnership with the *Department of Medical Science at Tung Wah College* in building a pre-Chiropractic program. (46) Then, in 2012, SY Ng created the *Hong Kong Chiropractic College Foundation* with the mission of building a chiropractic college. (47) Eric Chu from the CDAHK collaborated with *Tsinghua University* and *Life University* and established a Chiropractic research department in China. (48) However, these initiatives have remained in the planning stages for the past decade, highlighting the challenges involved in successfully bringing to fruition a Chiropractic education program in the region.

In 2018, the CDAHK and HKCA joined efforts to create a Chiropractic education program in collaboration with the *Open University of Hong Kong* (OUHK) and *Life University* in the United States. (49) The partnership faced numerous obstacles, such as political challenges, social unrest, and opposition from healthcare professionals to local government policies, which coincided before the program's launch. These challenges made it difficult to execute the school strategy, resulting in delays and the eventual suspension of the partnership.

Despite the setbacks, leadership from the CDAHK persevered and focused on designing innovative curricular models for emerging Chiropractic educational programs. Since 2013, they have collaborated with eight educational institutes at the Rubicon Group (50, 38) In 2023, the *Hong Kong College of Chiropractic* was officially announced at the CDAHK Annual General Meeting, with the principal from the *McTimoney College of Chiropractic* and the secretary general from the *World*

Federation of Chiropractic in attendance as witnesses. (51) The successful establishment of the college was made possible through a combination of factors: NYMG fully funded the management talent, local support network, and financials, while the *McTimoney College of Chiropractic*, a partnering school, provided academic talent and the international curriculum. The program has been accredited by the *Education Bureau Hong Kong* as a 48 month Master of Chiropractic, lending credibility to its establishment.

In summary, the establishment of Chiropractic colleges in Asia has been met with various successes and challenges. Notable examples of successful chiropractic education programs include the NZCC and ACC, both of which have benefited from an independent and comprehensive curriculum, strong international collaborations, and proactive engagement with stakeholders.

In contrast, efforts to establish chiropractic colleges in Hong Kong have faced numerous obstacles, including inadequate project management, lack of funding, and insufficient support from local communities. However, the recent founding of the *Hong Kong College of Chiropractic* (HKCC) demonstrates that perseverance, collaboration, and innovative approaches to curriculum development can help overcome these challenges and contribute to the successful establishment of chiropractic education programs in Asia.

Conclusion

Establishing the Chiropractic program in Hong Kong provides advantages like meeting growing demands, integrating into healthcare, enabling collaborations, and accessing diverse talent, but faces challenges including regulatory barriers, limited awareness, professional competition, and funding constraints.

By learning from past attempts and successful programs abroad, stakeholders can develop strategies focused on creating a rigorous curriculum, engaging stakeholders, overcoming administrative hurdles, raising public awareness, and securing financial support.

In my view, this young and pioneering program can transform Hong Kong into an Asia-Pacific hub for Chiropractic education and research, filling a vital healthcare gap. However there are also other programs now established and being established in the broader region which also have the aim of being a significant Asian hub of Chiropractic research and education.

With concerted effort, the HKCC holds significance for the Chiropractic profession and healthcare landscape in the region. This report offers insights to guide strategic initiatives toward the successful development of this impactful program and realisation of its immense future potential.

The take-away lesson for readers of this report is that Chiropractic education is alive and well in East Asia, Hong Kong China, and Asia. I also suggest that the future of Chiropractic in Hong Kong would be stronger if egos were put aside and the Associations united with a common purpose for quality education.

We must never forget that this world region is now home to most of the world's population.



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Cite: Ebrall P. Establishing Chiropractic Education in Hong Kong: A report of perceived advantages, challenges, and strategies for success. *Asia-Pac Chiropr J.* 2024;5.1. URL apcj.net/Papers-Issue-5-1/#EbrallHongKong

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