Edwards Expected to OK Chiropractors' Licenses

Stephenson: Injunctions 'Never Stopped Us'

BY TERRY KIRKPATRICK
BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Chiropractors have practiced for years in Louisiana under a cloud of public skepticism and legal tangles.

"I would say that at least half of us in Louisiana have injunction proceedings against us but this has never stopped us," said Dr. James Stephenson, a DeRidder chiropractor, and a state representative.

Stephenson authored a bill approved this past week by the legislature that would allow chiropractors to be licensed.

Gov. Edwin Edwards is expected to sign the measure, making Louisiana the last of the 50 states to license chiropractors. Mississippi, the 49th, acted in 1973.

"I've been practicing under an injunction for about 20 years," Stephenson said. "They placed me under an injunction prohibiting me from doing my thing but I've never quit."

PINCHED NERVES

Chiropractic is the treatment of the spine and nervous system. Chiropractors work on the spine to free pinched nerves that they say can cause such disorders as stomach ulcers, asthma and migraine headaches.

Most chiropractors attend chiropractic college for four years. Stephenson said some now practicing in Louisiana haven't studied in school but he considers them to be in a minority.

The practice itself has always been legal in the state but only persons with medical licenses could perform it. Although chiropractors are considered by the courts to be practicing medicine, they were never allowed a medical license, and were frequently charged with practicing without a license.

"From time to time, most all of us are under the gun," said Dr. E.J. Nosser of Shreveport, who has been involved in court fights for 16½ years of his 17-year practice.

FOUR YEARS SPENT

Nosser and another chiropractor are currently appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court their conviction for contempt of court for refusing to stop practicing when ordered to. Various legal appeals have taken four years. They hope the legislature's action will nullify the charges.

"It has bothered me, it really has," Nosser said. "You forget sometimes you're operating under a handicap. You do it so long with the threat of jail hanging over your head. The medical profession has damaged their own image. They have put a cloud of suspicion over chiropractic."

Medical doctors have been opposed to licensing chiropractors because they did not recognize chiropractic as a legitimate method of healing.

"OTHER TERMS"

"Their first idea was it is techaritanism and religious cultism and whatever other terms you can apply to it and they fought us over the years," Nosser said. "But our patients began to stand up for us."

Nosser, who is licensed in Florida, Mississippi and Oklahoma, says he frequently refers patients to medical doctors and has others referred to him by medical doctors.

The new bill will allow chiropractors to be paid from insurance claims and such programs as Medicare.

"I've been dealing with it about 25 years to get it passed and it's a wonderful feeling to get it done," Stephenson said. "You will see a great improvement in the chiropractic profession in the state."