

Welcome to the practicedna Podcast where we interview leaders in the chiropractic profession about what excites them and what has helped make their practice great. Practicedna is brought to you by Clear Health Media - your source for automated solutions for ethical patient generation, patient retention and increasing your practice revenue. Visit clearhealthmedia.com for more.

Matthew: So I am very lucky to have on the call with me today Dr. Anthony Coxon, he runs a multi doctor chiropractic clinic in Camberwell towards the centre of Melbourne and in addition he is also the current president of the Victorian Branch of the Chiropractic Association of Australia and he is also the co-host another chiropractic podcast called BACKchat. So welcome to the call Anthony.

Anthony: Good morning Matt, good to be here.

Matthew: It is great. Well, normally what I do is obviously we give a bit of an intro and explain to people who you are and so on but can you just give me a little bit or background about yourself, about maybe what got you into chiropractic, what made you want to become a healthcare practitioner?

Anthony: Oh, yeah, will be happy to do that. My first experience with chiropractic I was a year 12 student, I think I was probably about halfway through my year 12 and I developed a Torticollis, you know probably studying incorrectly at the desk and woke up one morning and couldn't move my neck, my mother had been to see a chiropractor on a number of occasions, I really did not know what a chiropractor was, so she took me along and to a chiropractor in Boronia and he has been around for a long long time he is actually retired now and I think his son has taken over his practice but he gave me my very first adjustment and I just remember thinking wow, this is one spectacularly good because it felt actually fantastic but also it was a rather weird experience as I said I never really knew what a chiropractor did, I was quite fascinated with the whole approach and I walked out of that office convinced that that is what I wanted to be. So it really changed me completely, at that time I think I was certainly interested in sports and certainly interested in health and medicine and those sort of things but I was really quite certain of what I wanted to do immediately after the experience which was quite life changing for me.

Matthew: So you sort of obvious came to it fairly late, a lot of chiropractors I speak to sort of get adjusted from the moment they are born but you got to it just before you really needed to apply.

Anthony: Absolutely, I literally just knocked in there and I remember going to my first interview, I think it was probably appropriate because there was almost like I just came up a high just like wow, this is so good, I am so interested in this and I think that probably came across in my interviews and yeah I was lucky enough to get in, I think I was the second youngest person in my year, I was seventeen and I

didn't turn eighteen until middle March. Yeah, that was the start of my journey and then of course I had pitch and that was, you know, an experience, I think the school, I owe much to the great school but I think there was an ease of which the lecturers were able to work and probably a little bit less pressure on them back in those days than there is today, and yeah from there I started to practice and haven't looked back since.

Matthew: Tell me about your current practice if you don't mind, you are obviously practicing in Camberwell. How many doctors do you have working in your practice now?

Anthony: We have two chiropractors, we did have three up until late last year when Joanne finished up with us and we probably do need female chiropractor in as well in fact I am having conversations with some people about that right now. But currently it is just the two chiropractors, one myotherapist and two remedial massage therapists. So our setup is that, I have worked in a few practices over the years probably three main ones, when I first graduated there was in Keysborough with Kevin Ulbrick and we had a great little practice out there for just I think a little bit over seven years and I guess I must have had the seven year itch and it was time for me to sort of move on and I moved into town and worked with Joe Hachem who went on as some people might know to win ten million dollars playing Texas Holdem, so he has done pretty. And then I was at the practice for a short time and moved basically my client base, I purchased a small portion that I would practice so I moved that practice to my current location in Camberwell. So we have an old sort of 1920s building that was the state back of Victoria for a very long period of time and we practice where the bank used to be and live where the bank manager used to live and it is a great setup for us.

Matthew: Wow, it sounds excellent, what was your biggest challenge that you faced when you actually went out on your own in terms of building the practice?

Anthony: As far as the Camberwell practice is concerned I was already, I guess how long would I have been in practice, so I had been in practice about ten years when I came to Camberwell and we have been here for fifteen years now. So I was already an experienced chiropractor I guess, at that particular time we bought the building and just I think nine months earlier we had also bought another property in Sorrento. So the biggest challenge was certainly a financial one, I do remember lying in bed at least a couple of times in that first month or so of practice thinking I hope I have a busy day tomorrow because the payments are due at the end of this month and right now the bank loan doesn't look so good. So I think when I was at Keysborough we had sort of quite a good strong year by year growing practice and I think profit was also well ahead of expenses at that time. I bought into which was much smaller sort of practice realised my portion that was. And so that was a slow build from there. So it is like just getting the wheels in motion really, you know, I had sort of committed to a bigger idea of what I wanted in my life into my practice, so, you know, the practice had to raise

up to that level. So it was a little bit stressful earlier on but eventually we got things going.

Matthew: I think that is an interesting point in that quite often particularly new graduates expect to be able to come out and land on their feet straight away and well, they certainly can do that you need to be prepared that you potentially going to have some hard work ahead of you in the first couple of years, maybe a few stressful years in terms of actually getting things going and meeting your financial obligations and so forth and to not be daunted by that.

Anthony: Absolutely and I think in the early days, in the early days for me it was actually probably a little bit easier because you have lived life as a student for, you know, quite some time and I remember I did a locum for Michael Bay in Vermont recon I was only in practice for about two or three weeks and he was away for, you know, I think three weeks or something, I had a little bit of my field work or placement as it is called now with him and I remember getting paid at the end of that period of time and I was actually, I had more money in my hands than I think I had ever had before. So when you are a poor student and, you know, scrapping on, you know, whatever you can manage just to make ends meet to certainly actually get any kind of income is just amazingly good. So I think as long as people are smart and sort of you know, financially savvy, don't go to crazy earlier on, don't expect too much the first couple of years, you are there to learn and grow and develop both as a person and a practitioner and it is not the time I don't think to be putting yourself under too much financial pressure. For me when I went to Camberwell it was a little bit different because I had been in practice for ten years and I think you go through life where you really stretch yourself and challenge yourself and then you grow into that challenge and then you stretch yourself again and you grow into that challenge. I think coming straight out of college years and it might be different for say a mature age student but certainly for me I was only twenty two, I looked sixteen, I really just needed to, I had stretched enough and I really just needed to grow into that and that wasn't the time to add additional financial pressure by trying to do something too crazy.

Matthew: Did you pick up any good poker skills when you were working in the same practice?

Anthony: No actually, I didn't even realise, I knew that Joe liked to gamble, like I wasn't at the Armadale practice for I think eighteen months before I moved across to Camberwell but I twice we had, you know, practice functions and took the CIs and everything out and both times he was into the casino, you know, to the restaurants and then to the, I just thought he was into it just a little bit but his story is really interesting, I don't know if you know it. He actually became quite unwell and had a disorder, I sort of lost touch with Joe a little bit so I don't know exactly what the disorder is. This is about a year or eighteen months after I had

left and basically he would get a lot of joint pain and had to actually stop practicing as a chiropractor and as I understand he went on to do mortgage broking and because he always gambled and just did a little bit of that he entered in online won that, got a place in Las Vegas and the next I think I know I am driving my car one morning and hearing Joe this, Joe that, won ten million dollars, I didn't hear his sir name but I thought for some reason it can't be Joe, it can't be, pulled into a local café, opened up on the Herald Sun and there he was with Australian flag around his shoulders and ten million dollars of cash sitting right in front of him. So not the story that most chiropractic students and young chiropractors out there will be able to emulate nor should I think they would try but it was a great story for him.

Matthew: Absolutely, that is certainly you want to tell your grand kids, that is for sure.

Anthony: Absolutely, my wife since then has encouraged me into gambling but it is just with my brother and my mate, so I don't think I am good enough to gamble beyond that.

Matthew: Yeah it when she is hoping for that ten million win was she?

Anthony: Absolutely.

Matthew: Can I just ask you what do you feel, I know we have sort of touched on some of the challenges facing new chiropractors but do you think there is any big challenges that are facing new chiropractors when they are coming out today that perhaps weren't present maybe ten years ago or when you graduated or something like that?

Anthony: Well I think we had just recently the Get Connected Seminar for new graduates. So this is basically looking at the one to five year chiropractors and we had a bunch of experienced chiropractors giving their insights into these sort of things and pretty much attempting to answer the question you have just asked made just in and one of the things that I talked about in that seminar was how, I graduated in 1990, I think I might be a little bit older than you but not by too much, you would probably remember in the Meede Report that came out in the UK published in the British Medical Journal basically had a medical researcher coming out and saying that people with low back pain should be seeing chiropractors and chiropractic is more effective than traditional medical care or physical therapy and then I think it must have been in the year before, I think that was in 94/95 and then in 93 there was the Manga Report in Canada, once again another independently funded report into low back pain and essentially the same thing, people should be seeing chiropractors and that should be the first line of care for people with these sorts of problems at least with respect to low back pain. So I think when I came into practice the chiropractic profession was in a very buoyant state, it was almost that thing that you are a good idea whose time had come and there was a lot of positive energy around these sorts of things.

Now if you contrast that with today, we don't have that and we don't have Dr. Meede we have the Friends of Science in Medicine. So it a much more negative political environment that surrounds chiropractic at this particular stage. So that makes it a little bit tough, when I was first graduating there was still some degree of antipathy from some people towards chiropractic you get the occasional person at a dinner party who would stay out of chiropractic which I always found as an interesting statement and I would say would you believe in accountants, you know, what is the sign to believe you, here I am I am a chiropractor and this is what I do but I think there is definitely more challenges for some of the younger graduates today in terms of developing a self-esteem within the profession. I think that these things are a little bit cyclical I think that Friends of Science in Medicine albeit to say that it is certainly not scientific that what they say, the problem is that there is some truth to it and chiropractors I think really have to own that and I think part of the reason for the cycle is that in a way chiropractic needs to clean up its act, I think the Friends of Science have been unfair and vicious to the profession and certainly overstep the mark tenfold but when we look at some of the websites that they can drag up as examples of chiropractic and mind you they are few and far between us especially now but you look at them and go hmm, that really shouldn't be on a chiropractic website, it is totally unscientific and it is just really fun for the people who might not want to work against chiropractors. So I think in a long term things will get much better, I think they already are, I don't want to put too much doom and gloom on this at all but suffice to say that Friends of Science in Medicine have had an impact but for the profession in a long term it might even be a positive one, I am still in a very positive about the future of chiropractic and for the young professionals. So I think they just need to hang tough a little bit do what has always has been very important and that is just about sort of being the best chiropractor you can be, to be intellectually honest, to serve your patients well and, you know, if you have the patience for chiropractic then practices will definitely grow.

Matthew: Yes, now I would agree, I think it is very interesting points what you are saying there, I think the Friends of Science in Medicine thing could potentially be very beneficial for the profession like you said to help us clean up our act and in some ways there is that saying, isn't there, I think, that you are judged by the strength of your enemies, I think it may have been a Bond film that it came from

Anthony: Yeah, very good

Matthew: Yes and obviously these guys are feeling some sort of challenge from our profession in order to put so much effort into discrediting us.

Anthony: Absolutely, if we were an insignificant bunch and I think that is what we might have been at some stage, we now have, I think chiropractic is now main stream. We have a lot of people that see chiropractors and I think most people you will see and still get some negative comments, a lot of people speak of chiropractors

very very positively and we see it in practice all the time. So yes I think because we are a far more significant player in the health market now then yes we have also attracted more negative attention for that reason.

Matthew: In terms of, I mean you touched briefly on the internet aspect there, how do you go about marketing your practice using digital methods, obviously you have a practice website, do you do much beyond that?

Anthony: We do, look, I used to write the articles for a chiropractic newsletter for many years so I have sort of taken that sort of skill that I developed over time and just started to write blogs for the practice. So that has been a good experience, so we try and release these blogs every two weeks in fact I am just about to release the next one today. The website provider that we use, they do write a generic blog and this is one of the things that, there is an art to writing and I wasn't a good writer to start with and I have learned how to improve that skill over time. But I think some of the generic things, you know, it can be really good but they I was never really satisfied with them because, like you have the diploma in neurology and I have I guess some strings to my bow now that I didn't have when I was younger I didn't think that the generic blogs really represented what I wanted to say or represented me as a chiropractor. So yes I have taken that on and I think that is a great way to introduce yourself to people outside of your practice, so when doing talks you can offer for people to be online at least blogs, health related blogs in which ways they can improve their vitality more being and I think that certainly has been a good thing, it has been new for me in terms of doing it this way. So it doesn't make a massive difference in the practice, I don't think any of this stuff does I think it is just now because it is out there everyone is looking at this sort of stuff rather than being just a cream on top of the cake, I think it is a must have, you have to have a digital presence but it is not what it will take to be. I think there are things that happen within the four walls of your practice that will always make much much bigger difference than what sort of nice shining niche you put onto Facebook.

Matthew: The way I tend to explain it with their clients is that we want to be having strategies in place that are going to get people into practice in the first place and then it very much becomes your responsibility to convert and maintain those people within your practice once you actually get there, you know, obviously there is a whole world of mouth aspect and you can automate that to a certain degree but that is going to be dependent on your internal systems and how you run your practice and so forth as well because eventually if you run an awful practice it doesn't matter how many people you have got coming through your website word is going to get around and that is going to work against you.

Anthony: Yeah, absolutely and I think you really have to set up your practice systems also and use a lot of digital media to better serve your existing patients as well. So for example when I recommend an exercise to someone I will then email them that

exercise and the software setup we use software, it is setup to make that whole process really easy. So I think if you have got systems like this in place you can improve patient compliance with exercise, I think generally I think the patient compliance to exercise is still poor, it is one of the ongoing challenges but I think you put into place it is very professional and just I guess use the patients or use the best opportunity to encourage that patient to do what you want them to do as far as follow up exercise or home advise.

Matthew: It is interesting that you are probably one of the few practitioners that actually write their own blog posts, we tend to find that a lot of people are very keen to do it but very rarely have the time and that is why we usually do it for them when we are doing the marketing.

Anthony: Yes and like I said before it is much better to have something going out on a regular basis that is written in a professional way and let us face it, on our website we used our providers blogs for many years and that was fine, I had a skill there I wanted to develop the skill further and so that sort made it that I don't expect most chiropractors will want to or have the inclination to do that.

Matthew: No, no exactly, it is interesting you bring up a point which I think a lot of chiropractors probably aren't aware of when you are talking about website content, Google has in place certain algorithms to determine whether or not content is original on your website and if you are subscribing to one of their services that just produces generic content and puts it on your sight and they have put it on two hundred other chiropractic sites as well, so in Google's eye it is effective saying your website doesn't have anything new, it is not particularly relevant and so we won't bother ranking you well on the search engines and so potentially you are going to reduce your catchment area on the internet, so the way you are going about it is about the best way to do it, in that your personalised content coming from you on a regular basis that is totally unique and is ending up on your website rather than anybody else's, so well done, keep it up.

Anthony: Thank you, this is great for me as well as just the podcast this is great I am enjoying the feedback.

Matthew: Excellent, it is good, no problem. Obviously we have chatted about the challenges facing new chiropractors, do you feel there are unique challenges that face older chiropractors that may have been in practice sort of fifteen, twenty, twenty five plus years

Anthony: Definitely, definitely and I would say by far the number one is that they lose the drive and passion, that it becomes mundane, that it becomes a real job rather than an experience that just can't wait to get in there. When I was young and as anyone I think who has been at uni for five years, if they have enjoyed the learning experience of being a student then almost always there might be some

anxiety or trepidation about moving into the profession but behind that there is also a great deal of excitement and I think that you improve exponentially as a chiropractor in those first few years there is no doubt about it, you know, my adjusting skills one or two months say afterwards was not nearly as good as it was one or two years out, so there an enormous growth to start with, you know, know the patients then to have a week where you see twenty patients, I was like wow I saw twenty patients this week and, you know, for us that might seem small and insignificant but at the time, you know, that was four times more patients than I had seen in a week just about. So that growth, you know, when you are in growth stagnation that is natural for that to happen in the early days, that is pretty exciting and I think I must have done I think a seminar every month at least and probably actually I did too many because I think I retained from one to the other very well but I just threw myself in there, I went and experienced absolutely everything and did any amount of seminars and was just appreciative of the experience and opportunity to grow and learn. And then I think we get to a certain stage in practice, you know, you have done all that stuff before and yes there is new information coming out all the time but maybe after a while you get to have children and then you get to buy a house and then you get into, you know, having rather than the money that you own it is just wow, this is fantastic and what will I spend it on, it is now like well I need to have that income because I need to pay that house mortgage or household bills or send my children to a private school or whatever it might be and I think some of the luster comes off your love for chiropractic and I experience that to some degree and that is sort of probably after about the fifteen year mark I think and actually the thing that helped turn around for me was certainly going on doing chiropractic neurology course. So I felt like I needed an academic challenge, I sort of felt like I had been practicing chiropractic for quite a while but there was no smarter than what I was when I graduated sort of thing and as much as I have done many seminars and learned many great ways to perform adjustments and these sorts of things I had never really been challenged in a way that I needed to be challenged. So I think I came into the neurology course the third module in, I missed the first two and I wasn't at all ready for it but I just kind of did it anyway and it took me a while to get up to speed with it all but I think that was certainly something that reignited my passion a great deal because it was sort of now looking at the deeper cerebral level and I just felt like I had a lot, even if I wasn't practicing so much in the chiropractic analogy perspective it just gave me a whole lot more of confidence and understanding what is happening with patients, confidence in communicating with other health professionals. So I think it doesn't necessarily have to be a course like that but I think for anyone who has been in practice for a while you have got to not so much reinvent yourself but you have got to challenge yourself, push yourself a little bit to the edge like I was saying before, you know, it is about creating a challenge and then growing into that challenge and it is something I think I had had a long period within the profession where I

hadn't created tough enough challenge for myself that really was available so that was really good for me.

Matthew: I suppose I would like to sort of ask your thoughts about what sort of inspired you and Paul Bergamo to start your BACKchat podcast because there are listeners who aren't familiar with the BACKchat podcast, maybe I should let you explain a little bit what the BACKchat podcast is that might be better.

Anthony: Sure, well in terms of who inspired it I can't take any credit for that except probably Paul Bergamo he certainly had his eyes on doing that well before I did and yeah, he just basically invited me along, we sort of talked about some things that we might do together in terms of helping each other with just in a few areas. He was coming on to the Chiropractic Association Victorian Branch Board and of course I was going on as president at the time that he was coming on. So we were sitting in a lot of the same meetings and those sorts of things and I guess because I had had a fair bit of experience with public speaking and we knew each other fairly well that he sort of envisaged this idea about integrating a whole range of health professionals that are experts in their field not necessarily just chiropractors and sort of felt that host, co-host sort of model would work better than just a host only. So yes we have now on iTunes five podcasts and there is another four that we have that we will sort of be releasing over time, the most probably exciting one we did was interviews with Prof. Ted Carrick on just the weekend just gone and of course he is in Cape Canaveral so I think the process start was about eleven o'clock on a Friday night and finished at about quarter past two on a Friday morning and I was practicing on Saturday and I had my daughters eighteenth birthday on Saturday night, so I suppose to say I was pretty bugged by Sunday. Ted Carrick's podcast it will be a three stage podcast so basically the past present and future for chiropractic neurology and for chiropractic profession at large. So that was really fantastic but I have really enjoyed actually viewing the non-chiropractic as well and really interested in how say for example two other people that have been interviewed have been GPs Margaret Peters who teaches medicine at Melbourne Uni and she also a researcher. She has done a lot of really interesting research into exercise and how accessibility to public transport influences people's walking time and hence a risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity. She is an integrated GP she does a lot of work on moulds and lung disease and you know, almost universally that the patients fall in to those two categories. So some really interesting people who I think as a chiropractic profession we have lived in solace way too long, it is really nice and refreshing to get view from other people and they are not the sort of views that I think some chiropractors might have of medical practitioners, they are a lot more open than you think when get talking to them on their right level.

Matthew: Yes, I think particularly when you like minded individuals in a different profession it can be a real eye opener in some ways and quite a wonderful experience to

feel that you are not in that you are not just in that chiropractic sort of vacuum like you said.

Anthony: Absolutely I think this is once I think the next step for our profession is certainly to collaborate more with other health professionals, John Kelly, chiropractor in Sydney once said that if chiropractic as a profession, if chiropractic was a kindergarten student then the report card would read strong, independent, resourceful but doesn't play well with others. So I think we need to play a little bit better with others definitely.

Matthew: Yes yes, and I think it is only for the benefit for their patients as well when we can operate in those multi-disciplinary environment in a good way.

Anthony: And I think one of the things that makes us a target for people like Friends of Science in Medicine is that we live in solace, you know, that we are misunderstood, that we don't integrate, communicate and collaborate in a way that we should with other health professionals. So sometimes the best form of defence is get to know your enemy and find that they are not really our enemy.

Matthew: Absolutely, once you scrape away that funny politics we are all human beings and one thing that really came home to me when I was in hospital having our children over the years is that no healthcare professional is there to mark out there patients, they all believe that they are doing the best thing for their patients and that I what motivates them and inspires them, they have different philosophies but they all have a desire to help the patient.

Anthony: Absolutely, I think at heart anyone who enters just about any health profession wants to do good by people and of course there are exceptions but exceptions I think are small and they are no more within chiropractic than within any other profession. So I think you are going to meet a lot of very positive people that are in the health industry and I think it is important for us to communicate with them and communicate with them in the language they understand and communicate in a way that is sort of who makes sense for them and us. So it is a challenge but that is certainly something that I see the profession moving towards.

Matthew: Yes, hopefully fingers crossed that will be a wonderful thing. And just in winding up can you suggest maybe a resource that has been particularly beneficial for you like a book, something apart from the BACKchat Podcast obviously because that goes without say, something that you feel would benefit other practitioners to either read or listen to or something else.

Anthony: Look I think one of the, for the younger chiropractors especially yes there is lots of great books, there is great podcasts, there is all those sorts of things and out there but one really underutilised resource is to get a mentor and in fact the Chiropractic Association in Victoria have a mentorship program with a matchup young chiropractors and senior chiropractic students with professionals of similar

interest. So, you know, just to be able to and we have had a general talk today that hopefully some people out there will get some useful from but I think when it comes to talking about an individual's needs and challenges to be able to have a sympathetic ear to chat through and develop strategies your way and getting the most out of the chiropractic career and your life personally really I think mentors are a really fantastic thing and that mentor shouldn't be your principal chiropractor if you are working for another chiropractor. Of course when I worked for Kevin Ulbrick in Keysborough I learned a lot from him but I think your mentorship is someone who is separate from your practice and it doesn't actually even have to necessarily be a chiropractor by the way but utilising that experience and knowledge of someone more senior than you or maybe if they have a specialist knowledge someone junior than you. I think that is really really important and for someone being mentored to understand that, two one is that you will respect the time and the knowledge of your mentor but also understand that when people reach a certain stage in their career there is a need for someone to be a mentor just as much as a need for someone to be a mentee. So don't think that you are totally being a sycophant if you are spending time and asking questions and doing all these things, the person doing the mentoring is getting as much out of it typically as you are. So respect their time, respect their wisdom but understand that yeah if you got the rights of the connection they are probably getting as much out of the experience as you are.

Matthew: Yes, that has certainly been my experience as well, I know when I have done teaching with students I do get as much out of it as the students in many ways and suddenly I found most people more than generous and more than willing to actually share their knowledge and share their time, even if you are not just in chiropractic but if you have a particular mentor that you are looking in, marketing your practice or a particular personal aspect as your life, people like to give, they like to be appreciated, they like to have their knowledge validated in effect by somebody else I think and I think you are very right there.

Anthony: That is for sure.

Matthew: Absolutely that is for sure. Good, well thank you very much for your time today, I really did appreciate it and I am sure the listeners have really appreciated this, you have been very generous with this and glad to have you on.

Anthony: Thanks Matt, it was a pleasure and good luck for the podcast I think it is a great way for people to access this kind of information so well done.

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