

# World Spine Care: from Botswana to Beyond

Readers of *Contact* will remember a recent article by former BCA President and current Secretary General of the WFC, Richard Brown (Winter/Spring 2014/15) about his time working with World Spine Care (WSC) in Botswana. Here Adam Wilkey, BCA member and European Coordinator for WSC, talks about the origins of the organisation and looks at the great potential it has for helping to make chiropractic care a truly global concept.



Some people believe in coincidences, for others the timing is just too good and there is a guiding hand or 'divine intervention'. Whichever way you look at it, World Spine Care (WSC) [worldspinecare.org](http://worldspinecare.org) is full of situations that have dovetailed to provide an ongoing tale of providing spinal care to thousands of people who would otherwise have found this unobtainable.

The story began during the Bone and Joint Decade Task Force on Neck Pain and Its Associated Disorders (2000-2010) when two committee members met to discuss the implications of the information and conclusions that were emerging. Scott Haldeman, President of WSC and Margareta Nordin, Vice President WSC, had come to realise the importance of trying to promote the findings of the task force and evidence-based care, not only in the developed world, but also in the developing world where there are huge numbers of people who are disabled by spinal disorders and had no access to any effective level of spinal care. They recognised that the growing burden of disability placed upon individuals, families and communities caused by spinal problems was not

evenly shared, with developing nations suffering disproportionately. Lower back pain has been recognized by the WHO as the leading cause of disability worldwide (*Lancet 2010*). They knew that action was required to help reduce this burgeoning burden and so, with a sense of determination and desire to help make a difference, the concept of WSC was born. With the seed firmly planted and expending vast amounts of personal time and energy, Scott Haldeman relentlessly drove the project forwards. Gathering support from the WSC Board, industry, medical and chiropractic communities, research grants and professional organisation endorsements, he established WSC in the USA and Canada as a non-profit charity in 2008 and 2010 respectively. Margareta was heavily committed to other projects at the time and was later able to join Scott at WSC, lending her considerable experience to the programme.

Meanwhile in Canada a successful chiropractor, Geoff Outerbridge, who had been raised in a missionary environment recognised within himself a portion of that zeal. After 10 years of clinical practice he

had begun to look for a new challenge in his professional life. By chance, a research associate of Scott Haldeman was referred to Geoff as a patient. During treatment, he described a project that he and Scott were nurturing to extend the scope of evidence-based spinal care into underserved areas where there was little or no effective care provided. Geoff was immediately seized by the concept and took this excitement home to discuss with his wife, Sophie. This was the genesis that would take Geoff and his growing family on an adventure half way around the world; from comfortable Canadian city suburbs to an arid land of dust, sand and heat, where his house companions could include cockroaches, scorpions, lizards and the occasional snake.

So the dynamic relationship between Scott and Geoff was born, one that was to entice other well respected professionals within the back pain community. Jean Moss, CEO WSC and President Emeritus of Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College, was drawn, like so many, to the project by the duo and the principles underpinning the activities of WSC, "To improve lives





in underserved communities through sustainable, integrated, evidence based, spine care". The seven core principles have underpinned the work of WSC ([worldspinecare.org](http://worldspinecare.org)):

- Sustainability, empowerment of local governments and communities to control their spine care programmes.
- Evidence based and integrative care to be emphasized.
- Education of local health workers and communities.
- Research to add to the existing knowledge base of spine care.
- Global, taking spinal care to all underserved areas.
- Sensitivity to local customs and cultures
- Compassion for those served by WSC.

Memorable historic personalities and institutions are often defined not only by their achievements but also by the obstacles they had to overcome to realise their dreams and, for WSC, this has been no exception. Many problems are encountered and overcome.

You might imagine that when Geoff arrived in Botswana he would find everything set up and ready to go. Unfortunately, he was to be shocked and disappointed. He arrived as the first Clinic Supervisor, with his wife and baby, to a house with a leaky roof, limited electricity and water, few contacts and no clinic. His initial role was to get things up and running, establish a clinic and a presence. Geoff describes the most difficult aspect of the job was managing his expectations and that of his wife through the turmoil of getting settled. Geoff enthuses about Sophie's continued support throughout the challenging years. Over time, following disappointments, delays and the

expenditure of a lot of energy, they came to understand who they could rely upon and trust. Over the ensuing months the project gradually took shape to the point where a clinic was finally ready.

Finally, in 2012, the idea first spawned in 2009 became a reality:

**Botswana was ready:** Government and health officials had committed to assisting WSC in establishing a pilot clinic, providing the buildings in Shoshong, some office staff, translators, housing for volunteers and pay, living and travel expenses for scholarship students.

Palmer and Canadian Memorial Colleges of Chiropractic were ready too. Both institutions agreed to provide free tuition scholarship for students from Botswana.

**The WSC Research Committee was ready:** With long-term sustainable facilities, clinical and research teams were able to work together to provide epidemiological data and information that could be used to build a clinical model for use in underserved areas around the world.

**Geoff was ready:** Having sold his clinic, Geoff and his family embarked on the adventure of a lifetime volunteering without financial recompense to run the Shoshong clinic.

With the clinic up and running, several areas of research opportunity have been able to be explored. This has included the formulation of a clinical model that is being refined, fine-tuned and, hopefully, will be replicated across the globe in the future, expanding beyond those areas that have no effective spinal care programmes. There is a distinct multidisciplinary flavour to all WSC establishments. Chiropractors, physiotherapists, spinal surgeons, researchers and yoga teachers are among those involved. For all of their apparent professional differences, they have been united by the common themes enshrined in WSC principles and their willingness to volunteer their time, expertise and support without financial reward.

With the fruition of a dream, you might expect that Scott would have decided to slow down and maybe head towards retirement. Not so, his efforts have not diminished in the slightest, with a continued focus on raising funds and awareness of the cause. All at WSC agree that one of the main obstacles that WSC faces is funding. Due to the work of Scott, Margareta, Jean, Geoff and the others working in the WSC team two more clinics, one in Botswana and one in the Dominican Republic have commenced clinical activities. There are plenty of countries eager to host clinics, but procuring funding

to cover the significant cost that WSC bears is an ongoing battle.

Finding enough volunteers to work in the clinics has also been a problem. It is preferred that volunteers spend a minimum of four weeks in situ to ensure continuity and sustainability which form part of the core values of WSC. There are no financial rewards. Geoff and the subsequent Clinic Supervisors spent 12 months working in the clinics without pay, living on savings. Although the rewards aren't financial, they do come and are priceless. The culture, the people, the sense of satisfaction that can be experienced provides recompense beyond the material.

When talking to Scott there is a sense that he has found a fulfilment that, in many ways, exceeds any of the multitude of professional achievements he has attained over his illustrious career. Whilst still working part time in a clinical setting, the majority of his hours are spent individually and with the other members of WSC in promoting their cause. With the vision of having "sustainable evidence based spinal care available in all areas of the world" there is still much for the team of World Spine Care to do. However, high the levels of enthusiasm and support that they are currently generating, ambitious goals are set and, in order to succeed, a great deal of help is needed from the grass roots of all professions involved in spinal care. There remains a mountain of work to do and you can help. Consider volunteering and obtaining the clinical experience of a life time or assist with funds; a little can go a long way!

Jean laments the lack of comprehension regarding the impact spinal problems can have in the underserved areas "I strongly believe that the impact of back pain in the developing world is completely misunderstood. It is not just a nuisance – it can be the difference between an individual and his or her family being able to survive."

If you would like to know more about the WSC or may be interested getting involved, go to [worldspinecare.org](http://worldspinecare.org) or contact [adamwilkeychiropractor@gmail.com](mailto:adamwilkeychiropractor@gmail.com). You can also follow WSC on Facebook and Twitter [@WorldSpineCare](https://www.facebook.com/WorldSpineCare)

The work of the WSC relies on donations of time and resources. If any BCA member is interested in fundraising for the WSC contact Adam Wilkey at [adamwilkeychiropractor.org](http://adamwilkeychiropractor.org), or making a donation, please go to [worldspinecare.org](http://worldspinecare.org)