

S5: EPISODE 5

with Jon Kec, D.C.

CHIROPRACTICAL

WOMEN IN CHIROPRACTIC: BATTLING BIAS AND BUILDING BALANCE



Jon Kec:

Welcome to Chiropractical, the podcast that helps you be better at what you do with new tools and new ideas. I'm Jon Kec, a chiropractor for the last 10 years, and your host on chiropractic. Today we're gonna take a look at Women in the Profession. Did you know that according to a recent a CA survey, 33% of practicing professionals are women up from the mid twenties back in 2010?

Also, recent trends are showing that more women are enrolling in chiropractic college than men. Where does that take us in the next 10 to 15 years? Will we be a 50 50 split between men and women in the profession? Today I'm gonna be joined by a couple of influential women, Dr. Brandi Childress and Dr.

Selina Sigafoose-Jackson. They'll take us through their paths in chiropractic, the experiences, opportunities and challenges they've faced and had to overcome, as well as where they see the profession going and some of those experiences, opportunities and challenges for the next 10 to 15 years. We'll also take a look at a few of the organizations.

They're a part of what they're doing to help not just women, but chiropractic professionals across the country. Dr. Brandi Childress, a practicing chiropractor in Atlanta, Georgia, and current president of the American Black Chiropractic Association. Also, Dr. Selina Sigafoose-Jackson Practicing in York, Pennsylvania.

The 2024 ICA Chiropractor of the Year just stepped away from a position as ICA president and a founding member of the League of Chiropractic women, Dr. Childress first. Was there anybody specific that kind of, or, or anything specific that kind of got you focused on chiropractic as your path?

Dr. Brandi Childress:

I was an athlete, Athlete a little bit. I played a little bit of soccer. Okay. I ride a little bit of track, and I think that was one of the things that kind of get got me into it, uh, understanding how chiropractors can, you know, help athletes in their bodies. Um, so that was one of the biggest things that turned me on to how I could benefit as an athlete from chiropractic.

Uh, and also I did get introduced to it by Mr. Mackle Harris. So anybody who, okay. Who text this out and they're familiar. Uh, Mackle Harris is a recruiter. He used to be recruiting for Sherman, but now he works at life. Here in Atlanta. So he's one of the other guys that were pivotal with, uh, [00:02:00] introducing me to the world of chiropractic as well.

Jon Kec:

Dr. Sigafoose-Jackson, tell us a little about what got you into the profession and, uh, your, your time and practice so far.

Dr. Selina Sigafoose-Jackson:

Did chiropractic choose me or did I choose chiropractic? And I think that answer is both.

Jon Kec:

Okay.

Dr. Selina Sigafoose-Jackson:

You know, having my dad being, we'll say a legend in his own time of chiropractic, um, but he used to always say, you can fool a lot of people, but you can't fool your kids.

And so all six of us kids became a chiropractor. Um, and I. I'm brutally honest. This is no secret. I went to chiropractic school to find a husband. I needed to, I needed to make sure that I married somebody that was in line with my way of thinking that I wasn't gonna have to buck my decisions and have to defend myself.

So I met my husband on day one and I thought, well, I'm here. I may as well be a chiropractor. So I became a chiropractor in about 17 years ago. I had a miscarriage and I, it just put me on this journey and I realized. Something, uh, something's going on here. And I kept praying that I needed an either a baby or a project.

Well, God didn't bring me one. He brought me two projects. So I became one of the founders of the LCW League of Chiropractic Women. And then shortly thereafter I moved into a leadership role in ICA. And so practice full-time in New York, Pennsylvania, have two daughters. One daughter just graduated from chiropractic school and we're trucking.

Jon Kec:

I'm gonna start with, I, I think our biggest question of the day, you both have a, a wealth of experience. What's the biggest challenge you personally are facing, but also women in general throughout the chiropractic field right now?

Dr. Brandi Childress:

I'll get started with this one. I'm pretty sure Dr. Selina is gonna give us a, a whole bunch of good stuff right behind this.

Um, the biggest challenge, I'm not sure if I can pinpoint just one, but coming from a female perspective with women, um, I think females have a tough time balancing the work life balance. With it. Females carry the babies. As Dr. Selina said. She, she went to chiropractic school to find [00:04:00] a husband, and then she was looking for the project and she got two.

But it's, it's, uh, it's, it's difficult to figure out for some women how to engage in the motherhood space as far as, um, you know, how long am I going to stay in the office? While I'm pregnant, am I gonna try to, to be here all the way up through month nine? Am I gonna get someone in to assist me and to take over, you know, with my adjustments, what does that look like?

Who is that that's gonna come in to care for my patients? And then once you have the baby, I. The question becomes, how long am I gonna stay out with my baby? Am I gonna bring my baby into the office? Is my office a space that's conducive enough to have the baby here and to be able to function and operate and to care for my patients the way that I need to?

So there's so many questions around that aspect of things for females of like, how do we operate and maneuver and make sure that our office and our practice is still functioning well while being a mom, while being a wife? While being nurturing, while being. And I think that's, um, that's one of the major challenges, especially, you know, most females, either you will find your husband while you're in chiropractic school or you'll find him right after.

So you're, we're like already in the space of. Having our children while there, or having our children soon after we graduate, and then having to figure out how to make it all work with starting up your new practice and growing the practice, but at the same time growing your family. And I think as far as you know, men versus women, that's one of the biggest challenges that women face because men will oftentimes leave those duties for women and, and women are forced with figuring out how to make it work.

Dr. Selina Sigafosse-Jackson:

I'm in. Uh, piggyback on that 'cause it's a common sense. That is the biggest challenge. You're right. But it's interesting that I did not perceive that as a challenge. And I think that is because, okay, I made the choice to go and find a husband that was in chiropractic that that wouldn't even have been a question.

We both knew what those answers would be long before we, and we were married eight years before we had children, but that is massive. And, and for me it was kind of like innately. Well, of course that's my job. There's not a challenge for me. But you know what was the biggest challenge for me as a woman is to not be a man.

Okay? To be in a highly huge world where when I graduated in 1989, it was all men. My mentor, my, my person I looked up to was my father. The person I followed behind was my husband, my older brother. I did have my sister to lean on who was eight years older than me, but how, how in the world do I live in a world where it's all men, but yet I'm not a man and I don't talk to patients, and I don't adjust, and I don't give the same advice as a man.

But I had to live under the, the umbrella of men, and it took me a long, long, long, long, long, long time. To realize I'm not you. I don't adjust like you and don't don't, and, and it, it, it, it brought our marriage to the brink many of times where I would have to say to him, it is this practice or it is this marriage.

Because I'm not going to duplicate what you do, so don't stand there in front of people and give me your whistle or your eye because you don't want me to do it my way. That I think for me as a woman married to a chiropractor, and I think even women that aren't married to chiropractors, the men are the leaders.

That's honestly, this isn't a plug for the League of Chiropractic Women, but we needed women mentoring women because all we had was men mentoring women. Telling women, to your point, Brandi, go home. Just stay home. Don't leave practice. Just stay home and have your children what? No, there is a way and we need to let the women decide how that way is, and the challenge was men were dictating how it should be.

Jon Kec:

It really, the biggest thing was kind of finding your path, right? And both your, your path through. Yeah. How to set up your practice, but also your path, how to navigate life and balance that practice. Anything that you can kind of point back to that was kind of a pivotal point for either of you in finding that, that true path forward, like Dr.

Childress, it sounded like. You struggled with kind of balancing that being a mom versus being a professional piece. Was there something that you, like light bulb moment for you that you were just like this, this is my path, or was there a person, maybe a mentor, like Dr. Sigafosse-Jackson, referenced that that helped you understand that?

Dr. Brandi Childress:

Actually I don't have children, although I'm speaking on behalf of women who don't have children. 'cause I do understand the challenges. We speak about it quite often. Sure. So, unlike Dr. Selina, I didn't come through in the eighties. I actually came out in the two thousands. So my experience was a little bit different.

And I was fortunate in the space to have people like Dr. Selina who did decide that the League of Chiropractic women was important. Um, we now have the women chiropractors. So I was able to see female and women leaders during my time in school in the two thousands. I still feel like I'm trying to find the balance, you know, I, um, having the practice, also serving as the president of the A BCA, I'm navigating it.

I have the path, but there's still ups and downs and times where I have to say yes and times where I have to say no. Absolutely. I don't think that I've perfected it, but I think that I've, I've, I've got a good space to where I can navigate and move. And still be effective and efficient. Uh, but, so yeah, I think that, uh, I think that my, my perspective is just a little bit different because yes, in initially, as Dr.

Selina mentioned, there were mostly men that we had, and they were the leaders and they were the bosses. Fortunately, again, I've seen a lot of women in leadership. I, uh. Saw Dr. Selina as serving as president of the ICA. Um, prior to me serving as the president of the ABCA. Uh, we had Dr. [00:10:00] McKayla Edwards, and I know some people are familiar with Dr.

Edwards. But, um, during my time for the ABCA. Um, with Dr. Edwards tenure, we were able to have our all first female board for the history of our association, and we are awesome, uh, approaching 44. And so having female president, vice president, secretary, treasurer of Parliamentarian, that was amazing because we, we never had it.

And you know, now. We still have a, a very high female presence in our leadership, but we still have the guys there, so we have a male back. The a CA also had, uh, Dr. Michelle Myers serving as president there. So I have had, you know, a few female role models and mentors to kind of see how they've done it and see how they're doing it to, um, be able to navigate my pathway a little bit better.

Jon Kec:

Dr. Sigafoose-Jackson, you've done it from the other side, right? You've been that mentor or, or helped people find those mentors? Did you have somebody that kind of pointed you into that path? Or can you maybe have a, a specific doctor you really helped on that path?

Dr. Selina Sigafoose-Jackson:

I think, um I think that a lot of trial and error brings you to that path.

A lot of this doesn't work. This isn't working. I have a long. Career ahead of me. I can't feel this angst from my whole career. I have to find a way. So a lot of soul searching, a lot of praying, a lot of inward looking and upward looking and prayer and listening. You know, listening prayer. It's one thing to do the speaking.

It's another. Thing to be quiet and hear, and, and, and again, innately know that that voice wasn't my desires. That voice was real. That voice is saying, Selina, you can't work five days a week, Selina, you can't be Kevin. One day I realized, wait a minute, I am not Sigafoose-Jackson's daughter and I'm not Kevin Jackson's wife.

I am Selina Sigafoose-Jackson, or how about I'm just Selina because all of those names attached to someone else. I'm just Selina, and it was the day where I realized I'll be a son of a, I'm done. I'm done. And it's time to make a change. And it wasn't a give up. I give up. It was a oh my head's down and I'm moving forward.

Jon Kec:

Let's take a look at the future of chiropractic. The, the recent past and where that may be taking us for the future. I guess I should say, I think it was a 2020, and correct me if either of you know this and I'm wrong. Um, a CA survey that said it's 32 and a half, 33% of the profession. Are women now up from 25 and a half or so in 2010, I think if not very recently, within the last four to five years, enrollment is now more women than men in chiropractic schools.

So that number is only going to keep climbing. Where do you kinda see women taking the profession and, and they're, they're ever growing larger. Percentage of the practicing doctors in this country. Where are we going from here?

Dr. Selina Sigafoose-Jackson:

You know, Gandhi said, if the world is to be changed, it'll be by women. On one hand we carry, and that's one of the biggest differences between me and my husband.

We carry so much compassion and empathy that just innately comes through us. Whether we have children or not, it is, it's in our DNA to. To just live and breathe differently. I do believe it's women who will keep chiropractic alive out of love, hope, and compassion. But I will say that I have a concern with that because if we have over 50% of the women as chiropractors, and as Brandi said so eloquently, these women cannot.

Be a hundred percent in practice. How do we, my concern is that yes, we have 50% of the women, but can those 50% of the women take the lion's share 50% that the profession needs? In my practice, it would take two or three women to do the job of what my husband can as far as seeing who volume, and that is not to down women.

I can't see the volume that my husband sees, and we need more chiropractors in this profession. If the more chiropractors that are coming in are women, women are going to have to, we're gonna have to recruit more chiropractors because we, we are the ones that are gonna leave the practice and have our babies and, and maybe go part-time and shift and change or take leadership roles because we, the world clearly needs us women to navigate.

In a different way than just a bull in a China shop.

Jon Kec:

Especially as the, the percentage of practicing doctors grow is going to be unbelievably important and unbelievably impactful.

Dr. Brandi Childress:

You, you know, it's interesting to just kind of go on with Dr. Sigafosse-Jackson's, uh, point here. Not only do women have this aspect of where we have to, you know, get out to take care of our children and our family, we also have to consider the wear and tear on our bodies.

You know, women are naturally, um, a little. Their bones have less mass and their muscles have less mass than a man. That's just natural. That's just how we're anatomically made. So if you are in a high volume practice and you are adjusting and you're doing a lot of side posture and you're doing a lot of shoulder work and you do this for years, it's gonna put wear and tear on your body.

So that might cut back on some of the time that you're actually able to do it, and that might be another factor that will contribute to us needing to have more female and more females and more women. To be able to treat our population, to treat our patients because so much wear and tear after a certain point, you know, you're not gonna be able to do it, you're just physically not gonna be able to do it at all.

Sure. So, um, I think it is definitely important that we continue to push to help recruit to get more young women as well as men. Um, I see this across healthcare and not just in chiropractic. I often mentor and train students who are looking to go to nursing school, dental school, respiratory therapy school.

And I see the same thing happening across the board where we have females that are, that are basically investing in these healthcare fields, but there's, there's gonna be a need for a balance. You know, even if we take over and we're more 50, 60, 70%, men are always, they're gonna be needed. And sometimes it is for the heavy lifting.

You know, people look at it and say, wow, this is stereotypical. Well, I may not want to put a 50 pound box or whatnot here, so I might need a man for the aspect. So we do need the balance of male and female energy to be able to make it work for both of us, both sexes in our career and our profession.

Jon Kec:

Dr. Selina, you kind of mentioned, uh, you know, trying to find. Realizing that you're not, you know, your husband or you're not any, any other, anyone else, man, woman, anybody else in, in your, your path, through your career, do you see any challenges in, in some of that interplay between the professions still potentially mostly male coming back to a, an ever-growing percentage of female chiropractors.

Are there barriers that you'll have to navigate your way through with, with those other doctors who maybe don't have the changes happening like we do?

Dr. Selina Sigafosse-Jackson:

I do not see an issue whatsoever being a female, dealing with other professionals. Not at all. And part of it could be that I don't allow it to be, I don't have that, you know, it's kind of like, and, and I don't say this for any other reason, but years ago we used to have a couple of women that came into the practice or we lots of times have people come and, um.

Shadow our practice, and I'm not on social media, so they can't circle back to talk to me unless they have my cell number. So they usually circle back to my husband and he'll say, well, why didn't you talk to Dr. Selina about that? And they're like, well, well, I don't think she likes me, or I'm afraid. And I'm like, what?

You gotta be kidding me. But I think what it is, is that I come from a space of. Take me as I am. This is it. You don't like it? Too bad. I'm moving forward. But I, I, I wanna say just in that interprofessional relationship, man or woman, I'm embarrassed, or maybe I should be proud one of these, but I have discovered chat, GPT, and if I have.

Somebody come back at us, a pediatrician, negatively. Oh, I get a chat. GPTI say, write me a letter, uh, that says this, this, this, and this. And it'll fly out a letter that is so eloquent because if I say it my way, there's gonna be some F bombs flying, but it'll write out a letter and I can, then, I can just say, here you go.

So it, it keeps my tone. And it says that's not appropriate. These are the facts, and it is so powerful. So if you don't use chat GPT and you feel offended by me, then come at me. That's all I can say is, is let's be open and, and I'm not a, I don't ever have a problem. In that realm, just because I'm a woman,

Jon Kec:

Dr. Childress, anything to add there?

Dr. Brandi Childress:

I actually have seen, at least in the past few years, where I do have patients that come in and they will tell me, you know, my, this doctor said to come see you, or This doctor said to come see you. So despite. What I heard quite often when I was in chiropractic school of, you know, the medical side doesn't like us.

They just, that, and the third, I'm seeing a little bit more of, of co-management and I think that's what it should be. Um, absolutely male or female because it's, it's all the same human body and we're all trying to make sure that it stays. Closer to the healthy side versus the unhealthy side. So if we're working on the same person, it's gonna be good to communicate what we are doing to make sure we're all cohesive with what we're doing to this person.

I think that we have made strides to the point where we can look past male versus female and be able to work together effectively.

Jon Kec:

Anything else, uh, challenge wise that you see kind of coming for women in the profession? The next, you know, 5, 10, 15 years even again, as that. Percentage of women continues to grow upward.

Dr. Selina Sigafosse-Jackson:

I think that's the challenge, is being able to say, this is me. This is how I want me to look. This is what I want my life to look like, and it's not gonna necessarily match someone else's and be okay. Uh, I don't say we sit back on our laurels and say, oh, I'm a woman and I can't. What I'm saying is that I don't wanna work Saturday mornings.

I. Or I don't want to do side posture. Uh, that is maybe how your other chiropractor did it, but I don't do it that way. I don't do side posture. I don't do anteriors. This is how it is. And so I would tell my 22-year-old self, I. It's okay. Build, you don't build what somebody else has put inside your head.

Sure. And then the challenges that I see in the future is exactly as I said, if we have so many women in chiropractic, these women are gonna have to, like Brandi said, we're gonna need either more women or more chiropractors and people to say like, okay. I practice 'cause we are now like it's beautiful that you practice with somebody, Brandi, that you're not, um, married to that person.

Women should, hopefully they don't have the ego and group together and practice more in group practices so that they can all, there's a couple of examples that are, that I know of women that do that and it's gorgeous. So. The challenge is to be able to say, I can do this with other women and not try to charge forward and do it on their own.

Dr. Brandi Childress:

I've been blessed. I, I chose, we made the decision when we were in school that, you know, he and I were gonna practice together. We're not married, as you mentioned, Dr. Selina. We are, we're very good friends. We're actually like brother and sister. He and I are in brother and sister, or I guess you could say our, our sorority and fraternity, our brother, sister sorority, fraternity.

And that's how he and I initially connected. And so, um, I'm very glad that we made the decision to practice together, um, for, for several different reasons. And one of the things that, that I see a lot of the young female chiropractors dealing with. Right now is, um, how to handle inappropriate situations with their male patients.

And, and I think that would be a challenge like forever. It's a very intimate profession. And so there are females that do practice by themselves and they have to figure out, you know, how do I navigate unwanted advances from my male patients? Um, and so they may come to their female mentors and say, you know, Hey, this is a, this is something that I'm dealing with.

How did you deal with this? And so me as someone who practices with someone else, that's been a blessing for us to try to combat that. We have the instances from both sides where we'll have male patients that say or make inappropriate comments in the office, and then there's also for him on the female side, there may be females that I.

We'll linger around or make inappropriate comments to him. So by us practicing together, being in our space, we are, we can act as buffers for things like that and kind of help each other out whenever we do encounter situations where there's, there's things that are inappropriate from patients or even from other people that may be of the opposite sex.

And so, um, that, that is a plus or a perk from being able to, to have. A male and female practice like that, um, you know, even if it was multiple females in a practice, that could also benefit them as well because again, there's somebody else there with you and not just you in that space with your patient.

So you don't have as many things that could go wrong when there's someone else there, there with you.

Jon Kec:

I appreciate all the conversation, all the perspective. Definitely, you know, new, new information for me, at least a new frame on it. So thank you for that. Before we kind of wrap up, I know you're both very heavily involved in a number of organizations, some very focused on women in the profession, others focused on the profession.

Dr. Selina, the League of Chiropractic Women. Why should women be excited? To get signed up?

Dr. Selina Sigafoose-Jackson:

Well, the League of Chiropractic women, like I said, it was initially made to mentor women in chiropractic 'cause they didn't have the mentor. But we very quickly realized that it's all women in chiropractic. I have two employees that have been with me for 35 years.

You know, they sometimes need the support of fellow women in chiropractic. Both of these employees. My one had both of her children at home. And then, you know, it's open to Administrators. It's open to all kinds of women because chiropractic is a way of life. And these women that dive in with us practitioners need the support as well.

So the League of Chiropractic Women has online programs. We have face-to-face programs to just really do exactly kind of have these conversations like we're having right now. And then the International Chiropractors Association next year is 100 years, and our mission is to protect and promote chiropractic.

Throughout the world and, and saying goodbye to my presidency recently. I'm proud to say that, you know, we've really had a big push for that. I went and spoke in Brazil in November and, and the young women that were there was off. The charts. I believe that we can't complain if we don't, aren't willing to step up and, and protect our own professions.

Jon Kec:

Dr. Childress, same thing with the ABCA or if there's another association that, that you think is something we should talk about today? I.

Dr. Brandi Childress:

The ABCA is the American Black Chiropractic Association, and our primary mission is to integrate and improve outcomes for persons of color entering the profession.

That's male, that's female. One misconception people think is that, you know, it's only for black people, um, but persons of color, you know, is all encompassing. Everybody has color to it. So we are open for everyone, anybody can join our association. The primary mission with improving, uh, incomes. What started a long time ago by our founder, Dr.

Bobby Westbrook, back at, uh, Logan University in St. Louis. And it was just because, um, there was a lack of support for people of color in the beginning. What I will say is that, you know, over time things have greatly improved as far as connections and communications for persons of color who are in our, our career field.

And I think that the A BCA has a role in helping to guide and mentor. People of color specifically, um, as well as women and men. And, um, this year we're kicking off our national convention this summer at Parker University. And with the changes of administration, it's been, uh, it's been. It has been interesting this year.

Uh, some of the challenges that I have, uh, faced, um, in the wake of, uh, changes with DEI, um, I am appreciative of all associations I-C-A-A-C-A-F-C-L-B, um, you know, you mentioned like, are there others that we should talk about here? Absolutely. We should talk about all of our associations that, that have missions.

To make our, to make what we do better and to keep our profession going, um, and making it great. We have, um, connections with so many of our great associations and we are very appreciative of the support that we have because my mission right now as president is to make sure that I learn as much as I can about the League of Chiropractic women and women chiropractors and the ACA and the ICA, and just make sure that.

All of our members know everything that is available to them. All of the opportunities, all of the techniques. So like Dr. Selina said, you gotta figure out and find what your niche is like, what are you good at? What is your thing, and perfect your thing. So, um, I've had a great time, you know, leading the ABCA.

I'm doc, like Dr. Selina. I'm on my way out. I, this is not my last year. I still have another year. But it has been, uh, fantastic working with the ABCA over the past 16 years as a student and transitioning over to a doctor. I've, um, met so many amazing leaders across our profession by serving the ABCA.

And I feel like this is just the beginning. I can't wait to see, you know, what is in store for the future and how I'll be able to interact with other leaders in our profession.

Jon Kec:

We'll make sure we get links to everybody down on the show notes. That way they can find any information on, on anything and everything.

Get involved. Be willing to stand up and say something. Nothing's gonna change unless you do, and if you don't have the resources to know who can support you to say things and, and get involved. You don't know where to start, so we'll definitely get that all linked as well.

But thank you both so very much again for the time today, for the perspective.

Dr. Selina Sigafoose-Jackson:

One more shout out. Yeah, of course. NCMIC, NCMIC has unbelievably totally flipped me 180 in in it's unreal caring for the chiropractic profession as a whole. I grew up not knowing exactly. What NCMIC was about, and in the past four years, the relationships that I've built with NCMIC and all of your leaders and what you're willing to do and ask for nothing in return is off the charts.

Amazing. So I just have to, I could not go on without saying Thank you guys so much for all that you're doing. It's amazing.

Dr. Brandi Childress: I just co-signed Dr. Selina, and I'd say thank you NCMIC You guys are amazing. Uh, your motto of We take care of our own. I, I, I will know that until I die, because you guys truly live up to that.

And, uh, we appreciate you from all of our associations, all the leaders. We appreciate NCMIC for everything that you guys do. Thank you for the support of the chiropractic profession. We look forward to continuing to work with you guys like this. Thank you so much.

Jon Kec:

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you as well.

That is, that is extremely humbling. Uh, I just wanna say that was not planned. I had no idea anything was coming, so, I appreciate the kind words, so very much. And thank you again, ladies for your time.

Dr. Brandi Childress:

Thank you. Thank you so much. Thanks.

Jon Kec: One more time. A big thank you to our guest today, Dr. Brandi Childress and Dr. Selina Sigafoose-Jackson Jackson.

As mentioned links to all the organizations we discussed, the League of Chiropractic Women, the ICA and the ABCA, as well as other organizations will be in the show notes below, and as always. Feel free to watch us on YouTube.

If you have any questions for us, our guests, or any suggestions for our next topic, please reach out at AskNcmic@ncmic.com.

I'm Jon Kec. Thanks for joining Chiropractical, and we'll see you next time.