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USA Today Consults Chiropractor on Airline Seating

By Barbara Migliaccio

USA Today, ranked second in newspaper circulation in the U.S., sought the opinion of chiropractic in a February 20th story on the comfort of airline seating.

American Airlines recently remodeled 10 of its DC-10s to create a "business-class" which has amenities halfway between the luxurious first-class and spartan coach sections. USA Today staff reporter Doug Carroll contacted Scott W. Donkin, D.C., to get an expert opinion on how the new seating in American's business class stacks up.

According to Dr. Donkin, Mr. Carroll originally contacted the American Chiropractic Association (ACA) and spoke to David Shingler, the ACA's director of communications, who referred the reporter to Dr. Louis Sportelli. When speaking with Mr. Carroll, Dr. Sportelli suggested that he contact frequent flier Scott Donkin, D.C., an ergonomics consultant, and author of *Sitting on the Job*.

"Apparently it came up in a reporters' meeting that they should evaluate this new airline seating, and just spontaneously they wanted a chiropractor's opinion," said Dr. Donkin. "I think that says a lot about the elevation of the chiropractic profession."

American Airlines took it very seriously when they learned that Dr. Donkin would be rating their business-class seating. The company sent their public relations director and an engineer to answer any questions the seating critic might have. Dr. Donkin spent about four hours, from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., on the American Airlines plane examining the business-class seating.

Said Dr. Donkin, "I was very surprised to find out their definition of comfort: it's slumping. Most people think that. Of course, from the chiropractic perspective, comfort means to keep the natural curves in the spine. We need to change the general definition of comfort."

He graded the business-class seats with a "B", and suggested that American teach passengers how to adjust their seats so that the spine forms the soft, natural curve that it normally should. Adjusting the seat also includes using blankets and pillows strategically to support the neck and back. He gave a good rating to the business-class headrest (it can be moved up to accommodate taller passengers and is soft in the middle and firmer on either end), as well as the adjustable leg and footrests. Dr. Donkin said these features make it easier to adapt the seats to different passenger heights.

First-class seats got a "B+" because they recline further and their legrests will adjust to a higher position than those in business-class. Dr. Donkin gave coach seats a "C-" because the backrest does not fit the natural contours of the body. Although the coach seat has flared sides for lateral support, he says in the article, "It's like having a size-10 shoe fit everybody ... People could fit into the seats, but they couldn't fit comfortably."

Dr. Donkin's participation and information were crucial to the USA Today story. He said that he hopes the media will begin contacting chiropractors more often to get their insight. One advantage is the profession's readiness to help. "The reporter was very appreciative and surprised to find such cooperation from the ACA and chiropractic," said Dr. Donkin. "He said that often they find that organizations aren't very helpful with stories. Our ability to respond to requests is going to be key in this kind of media activity."

The article is an acknowledgement of chiropractic's vital and practical value in many different situations. With this excellent piece, chiropractic has again enhanced its reputation on a national level. This is yet another step toward greater respect and equal status for DCs everywhere.

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Second Assistant Editor

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