

[IMAGE]

Natural Health in the Spotlight

By Brenda Duran

As Miss South Dakota 2011, Chandra Burnham, prepares for the upcoming Miss USA Pageant, she's also preparing for a career as a doctor of chiropractic. In both pursuits, she's eager to put natural health in the spotlight and promote the value of chiropractic care.

When Chandra Burnham was a teen, she envisioned herself among the beautiful, intelligent, confident women strutting across the stage in the glamorous pageants she saw on television. When the images of shiny gowns, glamour and glitz would flash on the screen, Burnham was inspired and always in awe.

"I actually can remember thinking, 'Wow they are amazing ... and they have brains to go with it,' she recalled.

This past October, Chandra was able to see her dream come to fruition. Flashing a huge smile in a strapless sparkling floor-length gown, Burnham was crowned Miss South Dakota USA 2011 at the Brandon Valley Performing Arts Center in Brandon, S.D. The crown was her golden ticket to compete in the upcoming Miss USA Pageant, scheduled to be held in Las Vegas and air on NBC in June.

chandra burnham - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Chandra has always known big dreams required hard work. The Highmore, S.D. native paid her dues by participating in at least eight pageants before her win and mentally prepared herself with unwavering determination – a quality she said ultimately set her apart.

"I walked into that pageant and thought, 'OK, I want this job, I am ready for this job. I have to step it up and show these judges I am the most qualified,'" she said. "It really is a job and it's more than just walking on a stage and smiling and waving; you have to be able to communicate with people and you have to be able to get your message across. I was the most prepared for that this year and luckily the judges saw that."

The victory meant more than a crown and publicity to Chandra. It also meant a window of opportunity had opened for her to achieve some of her other lofty goals in life – including promoting her passion for chiropractic care. At age 23, she is currently studying to be a doctor of chiropractic at Northwestern

University of Health Sciences in Bloomington, Minn. It is a career that will certainly make her stand out among her peers and other pageant contestants.

Although females make up half of the students at chiropractic colleges nationwide, fewer of them can be found in today's chiropractic practices. Currently, only about 22 percent of doctors of chiropractic are female, compared to 77 percent male, according to the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners Practice Analysis of Chiropractic 2010.

The statistics clearly show it is a male-dominated profession, but Chandra, who is used to the female-dominated pageants, isn't intimidated. Instead, she said it has moved her to focus on the long-term benefits she will reap after she pursues her career goal.

These days, she is hitting the books with the same determination that got her the reigning crown at her last pageant. "Your reign in pageants is only a year ... but with chiropractic you also get to reach out to a lot of people [for much longer than just a year]. I don't think you can beat that feeling; I think it's going to be even better than winning a pageant," she said.

Following Her Bliss

A stubborn knee problem and a change of course were what steered Chandra toward her chosen professional path. Initially a pre-med student, she had set her sights on a career as a pediatrician. She knew two things for certain – she loved children and she wanted to help those in need. However, the volunteer work she did in pediatric clinics proved to be too much for her emotionally.

"It is really, really heartbreaking when a child passes away or when they come to the hospital and find out they have a terminal illness and will never be able to leave the hospital," she said.

This realization led her to research other medical careers where she would be able to make a difference. Chandra quickly found her niche when she began working as a chiropractic assistant in Brookings, S.D. It is there where she said she "fell in love" with the profession because of the "miracles" she saw it do for many of the patients who came in for care.

Chiropractic care had already made a huge impact on her life – it had helped her overcome a debilitating knee problem she had suffered from for years; a problem that had restricted her from enjoying her favorite hobbies such as running. After countless doctor visits, Chandra remembers she could not find relief until she

found a chiropractor.

"He (the chiropractor) took the time and examined [my knee], did some adjusting on it and some tweaking here and there, and it's never felt better or worked better," she said. "It hasn't gone out on me in over three years ... the pain was excruciating and now it's completely gone, I was so amazed."

From 2008-2010, Chandra was able to soak up more inside knowledge about the profession by working alongside the two chiropractors in Brookings while also preparing for upcoming pageants.

"As that first patient came in, I saw them get better, treatment after treatment, to the point where they were completely healed," she said.

chandra burnham - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Those two years proved to be the reinforcement she needed to decide how she would spend the rest of her professional life.

As a doctor of chiropractic, Chandra wants to help others the same way. She plans on focusing her career on sports injuries – women and children in particular – through chiropractic care.

"I love children," she said. "I am really interested in sports, volleyball and dance ... I want to help all of the female athletes function at optimum levels."

Like most chiropractic students, Chandra spends her days studying; but unlike others, she also juggles a large number of pageant duties. It is enough to keep her schedule booked all year long. The road to being a chiropractor, like a pageant contestant, is a rigorous one – a challenge Chandra is ready for.

"It's a lot of hours and it's a lot of studying, but it's what I am really interested in, so I don't mind," she said.

Most chiropractic programs across the country require that applicants have at least three years of undergraduate education, and an increasing number require a bachelor's degree. Undergraduate studies also include a prescribed number of prerequisite courses, as defined by the field's accrediting body, the Council on Chiropractic Education. Current entrance requirements for the Doctor of Chiropractic degree program also require a minimum of 90 semester hours and a minimum cumulative grade-point average of 2.50.

On top of that, preparation for a pageant normally takes up to 10-15 hours a week. Chandra is now in her second trimester and has about three years left to complete her doctor of chiropractic degree.

The pageant winner makes sure she is just as active in chiropractic organizations as she is in pageant events. She is a member of the Student American Chiropractic Association and attends professional events such as the National Chiropractic Legislative Conference, and also promotes the Foundation for Chiropractic Progress, a not-for-profit organization that helps increase public awareness of the many benefits associated with chiropractic care.

Her enthusiasm for the profession has impressed her professors, who say she is a role model for many other young women who want to follow in her footsteps.

"Chandra stands out, she is always eager to go above and beyond of what is required," said Dr. Terry Erickson, associate professor and chair, department of business and professional foundations, at the College of Chiropractic, Northwestern Health Sciences University. "It's not very common for a student to do that in a pretty intense program like this, especially at the same time as a pageant. Her persistence and work ethic is pretty impressive."

Dr. Erickson said Chandra has taken the initiative to promote the chiropractic profession at numerous campus speaking engagements, which has served as good practice for the upcoming Miss USA pageant, where she will have to speak in front of thousands.

In the Spotlight

As she prepares for her moment at the Miss USA pageant, Chandra is busy focusing on her health and fitness. At the Miss USA pageant, she will be judged in categories such as swimsuit, gown, and how well she does in the interview in hopes of making it to the semi-finalists round (the runners-up and winner are announced at the end of the telecast).

Her preparation includes being a regular at the gym, lifting weights three times a week and doing cardio exercise six times a week. She also leads a healthy lifestyle that involves a clean diet.

Chandra's 5 Tips for Staying Healthy

1. It's important to start out slow and make gradual changes.
2. Stick with it. It takes 40 days for a habit to kick in, so stick to it and it will be beneficial in the end.
3. Get motivated. If the motivation is not there, nothing is going to change. You have to want it bad enough.
4. Surround yourself with the right people. Stick with the kind of people who will encourage you.
5. Lift weights. Even for women, it's important to build lean muscle.

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As Miss South Dakota 2011, Chandra Burnham has an ideal platform to share her vision of health and wellness - a vision that puts chiropractic care front and center.

"I try to eat well. I don't really cut calories. I eat a healthy, balanced diet with appropriate calories for my build and stature," she said. "I try not to eat out; I don't buy junk food so that it's not in my house. I grab that apple instead of a bag of chips."

When it comes to her spine, Chandra is also practicing what she preaches through routine chiropractic care.

"It's such a good immune booster, and there are so many injuries that can be prevented by regular chiropractic care as opposed to waiting for something major to happen and then trying to fix it," she said. These types of benefits are the ones she is eager to talk about at the Miss USA pageant, she said.

Even if she doesn't win the top prize – the Miss USA crown – Chandra said the best part for her will be promoting the benefits of chiropractic care as her main platform and knowing that when she becomes a doctor of chiropractic, she will always be a winner in the eyes of her patients.

"People love their chiropractor and what they can do for them. That's what made me want a job like that. I mean, how rewarding is that?"

Interested in Becoming a Doctor of Chiropractic? The First Steps to Take

chandra burnham in chiro office - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark *Talk to your chiropractor.* Your DC can tell you how they pursued their career and give you advice on where to start.

Do the research. Just like any career, you need to research it – what it’s all about, the educational requirements and licensing process, your college choices, etc. Know what you’re getting into.

Get experience. There are various opportunities throughout the year for prospective chiropractic students to learn more about the profession, from events such as Parker Seminars Las Vegas to the National Chiropractic Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.

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