

Who Needs Research? We Already Know Chiropractic Works!

Michael Pedigo, DC

Recently, I was reflecting over important events that have occurred just since I have been in practice: events that have had a major impact on the growth and strength of this profession. While many important things have occurred, the list of truly major items is short:

1. Chiropractic associations are the lifeblood of the profession.
2. The *Wilk vs. AMA* antitrust suit stopped an illegal attempt by organized medicine to eliminate the chiropractic profession, and opened the door for our profession to advance and move into mainstream health care.
3. The CCE upgraded our educational standards and brought credibility to the profession.
4. Research is so important that a strong case could be made for making it number one on the list.

All of these items are interrelated and of such importance to this profession that several pages could be written on each one.

My focus for this article, however, is on research. Many of you know the importance of research, while others seem to shrug it off, as if to say, "Who needs research? We know chiropractic works." I have found it interesting to observe the positive impact research has had on our profession, and how the lack of research has created huge roadblocks for professional advancement.

Not long ago, one of the AMA's attacks on our profession was that we were a danger to the health, welfare and safety of patients; that what we did was of no health benefit and often delayed needed medical treatment. They attacked us for a lack of research, and at the same time did all they could to stop any funding for chiropractic research. Once the *Wilk* case stopped their illegal boycott, research began to increase and has been accelerating ever since.

There is now a large body of research that clearly establishes spinal manipulation/adjustments as one of, if not the most effective, means of correcting acute low back pain. These studies have opened the eyes of many decision makers about the benefits of chiropractic care for acute low back pain. These studies were (and are) vital to our profession because more and more outcome studies are being demanded. Because we have a growing body of evidence that we are cost-effective and can truly help people, it is now more difficult for those competitors who want to cut us out of the health care market.

The profession continued to get hammered for making claims that chiropractic was effective for

more than acute low back pain. Why? While there were many reasons, the most important was a lack of research supporting any other benefits. Recently, some studies have shown that back pain does not just go away after 30 to 90 days, as had been claimed by some MDs and insurance companies. Other studies reveal that spinal manipulations/adjustments not only help acute low back pain, but are also effective for chronic back conditions. These studies have important positive ramifications for our profession. Now, when insurance companies deny payment for chronic care, we have data to support the need for such care.

New research is showing the benefits of chiropractic care for neck and headache pain. This is something every DC has known from day one, but we lacked the data to prove it. When research for manipulation/adjustments got into full gear several years ago, it was mostly directed at acute low back pain. That is changing, and none too soon. As important as that research was, we were in danger of being locked into what I called "a low back doc box."

Our profession has received and continues to receive its strongest criticism for making claims beyond low back and neck conditions. Why? Because of a lack of research data to support such claims. That too is changing, thanks to recent research that is beginning to show supportive data for such conditions as:

- carpal tunnel syndrome;
- dysmenorrhea;
- premenstrual syndrome;
- scoliosis;
- otitis media;
- colic;
- enuresis;
- asthma; and
- GI dysfunctions.

Certainly we need more research in these and other areas, but this research will begin to open the eyes of open-minded people to the possibilities of our profession, people who had placed our profession in a small box. It will open doors with legislators, insurance companies, employers and society in general as more supportive data is compiled.

Our profession can greatly advance the acceptance of chiropractic as mainstream health care by refusing to make unsupported claims and by supporting research. The FCER is always in need of support. They do a great job of supporting research and would welcome your support.

APRIL 2000