

Philosophy and Its Application in Practice

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Recently a patient of mine said, "It's amazing what a few minutes in your office does for my life." When she said that, I thought, "Wow!" It's so easy to take for granted how much a spinal adjustment can do. Not only does it relieve pain, but it also improves the quality of a person's life. We see it day in and day out, year after year.

A few days ago, a patient of mine called and said her six-year-old daughter had fallen on her head in gymnastics and had neck pain. Her neck was "kinked" to one side and couldn't straighten it up. She had taken her daughter to her MD, who examined her, told her she had a muscle spasm, and did nothing to help her.

The mother brought her in to see me. I could tell immediately that she had a wry neck -- her head was drawn way over to the right. I examined her, adjusted her very gently, and had her return the next day. The next day, she had no pain, her head was erect, and she had full range of motion. The little girl was smiling and happy. Don't tell that little girl or her mother she shouldn't see a chiropractor just because she's a child!

The MD should have told the mother to take her daughter to see a chiropractor right away. One thing about wry necks -- the quicker they are adjusted, the faster they respond. I have seen many that were not adjusted for weeks; they just get worse and more difficult to correct. On the other hand, if they are adjusted the first or second day after, they respond fast, especially in children.

A few months ago, I wrote an article that appeared in this column about a 20-year-old schoolteacher who came in as a new patient. Her symptoms were far from the normal. If you read that article, you may recall a week prior to seeking my help, this patient had developed numbness in her right arm and leg and found it difficult to talk. She spoke very slowly, slurring her words. Her lips on one side did not move when she spoke. She also had difficulty using her left arm. She was unable to hold a pen and write. She reported neck and upper back pain and mild low-back pain.

She had seen her MD, who ordered a CT scan (which was negative). He had referred her to a neurologist who in turn ordered an MRI, which was also negative. Her doctors were unable to find the cause of her condition.

The day after her first adjustment, she reported a reduction in her numbness. Following the next adjustment, she reported no numbness in the right arm. Gradually her pain reduced. After three weeks, she had normal speech and normal mouth movement, no numbness, and only slight to mild pain in the neck. Her grip was normal in both hands. She resumed teaching and was adjusted for a few more weeks twice a month. I then released her on an as-needed basis and instructed her to continue with the exercises I had prescribed for her.

I bring up this patient and her response again because there are a couple of points I believe are worth writing about. How many people suffer needlessly because they don't know about the possible benefits of chiropractic care? The truth is millions of people are suffering needlessly

because they don't know they need chiropractic care and/or don't believe it could help them. Why is that?

This profession has been here for over 100 years! There are, of course, many reasons, one of which has to do with the AMA's illegal boycott of our profession and their goal to eliminate the chiropractic profession. The residual effects from that effort are still with us.

Another reason has to do with the way we communicate, or at times, more accurately -- the lack of communication -- with society. No matter how true something is, if the listener does not believe you, to them it is not true and the message falls on deaf ears. We must learn to express ourselves in a truthful manner that is reasonable, rational and logical to society if we are ever going to reach the masses.

Chiropractic philosophy sustains the chiropractor. Some chiropractors don't like to use the term "chiropractic philosophy" because others have turned the word into religion. When you boil it all down, philosophy is nothing more than a hypothesis or a belief system in something. If you don't believe in what you are doing, it's difficult to get excited about going to the office every day to adjust patients.

But it's also important to keep things in perspective:

1. There is what is, which is fact.
2. There is what you believe, which may be correct, partially correct, or wrong.
3. And there is what someone else believes.

When I say philosophy is nothing more than a belief system, don't misunderstand me. I believe it is important, and within this profession there are many different opinions about what the "true chiropractic philosophy" is. Philosophy gets intermixed into all kinds of things -- from a thought process, to strong beliefs, to practice management, to just "tell the chiropractic story."

I see many chiropractors that say they are just going to tell the chiropractic story. They give no thought as to how the message will be received. The words we use to communicate are vital. Ask yourself: what is the goal? Is it to thump your chest telling the "chiropractic story," or is it to have the audience hear the message, understand the message, and take action by seeking chiropractic care?

Outrageous and unbelievable claims turn more people away from chiropractic care than it brings in. Since some people respond to such claims and become patients, many doctors don't stop to think that for every one such patient they get, they turn off ten, who in turn badmouth the profession. Think before speaking, think about how society will receive your message, and don't make outrageous claims.

The story I shared with you about my patient above would be very difficult for much of society to believe and accept because there is no research to support such a thing happening. Was it a coincidence that this patient responded as she did? I don't think so, and I could list a number of valid reasons for that opinion. What I can't do is prove it.

If I had 10 patients with the same symptoms, how many would respond to chiropractic care as she did? I don't know. No one does. Should I go around making claims that I can cure such symptoms? I don't think so. What I told this patient was, I don't know if I can help you, but I am willing to try. I believe that was the proper course of action in this case because she had already been to her GP and neurologists and had both a CT scan and an MRI.

What if she came to me first, without seeing any MD? How would you handle such a case? I believe the only responsible thing to do would be to have her evaluated by a medical specialist to rule out a stroke. Without doing that, I would be opening myself up for potential malpractice legal action. The ideal way to handle such a case would be to work jointly with the MD.

If our profession is ever going to be credible about claims or suggestions that we can help more than just back and neck pain, then it must do the research to support such claims. There is no substitute for research. Much of the profession's gains in credibility in all segments of society are the result of winning the antitrust lawsuit against the AMA in *Wilk vs. AMA*. That stopped the illegal boycott of our profession, exposed the AMA for what they were, and made it possible for joint research to be done. The second major factor is that research was done. Lifting of the boycott opened the door, but we had to take advantage of it by walking through the door. Doing research was an important part of walking through the door. Research was done and has proven we have much to offer society, especially for low back pain, but we have a need for much expanded research. Without research, we have just anecdotal evidence. To expand our credibility beyond low back, we must have expanded research. I say again: there is no substitute for research.

In the past few years, the news media coverage of our profession has been much more positive than it has been in the past. It started when the AMA was exposed for their wrongdoing in trying to destroy a competitor, and it has grown as research has proven some of the benefits we have to offer. However, we still get "black eyes" from the media for making claims beyond back and neck pain because we have so little research in other areas.

I hear some chiropractors say, "I don't want acceptance, and I don't care what anyone says." They miss the point. If the goal is to have people come under chiropractic care, we must have credibility! How many people have health problems that could be helped with chiropractic and suffer needlessly because they never think of going to a chiropractor and because we have no research to point them in that direction?

It's nice to talk about philosophy, but in today's marketplace claims must be backed up with data, and that means research. It's time this profession put its beliefs to the test of valid scientific research.

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