

What's Wrong with this Picture?

WHY IS THE OBVIOUS SOMETIMES SO HARD TO SEE?

Donald M. Petersen Jr., BS, HCD(hc), FICC(h), Publisher

Part of my job as editor of Dynamic Chiropractic is to monitor what other segments of health care are doing. This requires reviewing a number of research journals, and trade publications from medicine and managed care. One of the best sources is the American Medical News (AMNews). And while it is a publication of the American Medical Association (AMA), it still has some objectivity.

The front page of the September 16, 1996 issue of AMNews features two articles and accompanying graphs that have to make you feel ill.

The top graph shows the number of pharmaceutical sales people who are calling on physicians and managed care organizations. After a few years of declining numbers, the sales forces of the drug companies have climbed to almost 41,000 strong. That's roughly one prescription pusher for every 15 MDs!

The bottom graph presents a similar trend, but belongs to a different article. This graph tells the reader that after a few years of decline, the percentage of young people using drugs has increased to approximately 11%. The number of marijuana users is also on the rise (over 2.2 million Americans in 1994).

The top story in the very next issue of AMNews (September 23/30, 1996) is on the need for better safety information on prescription drugs. This article reveals more disturbing facts:

"Nearly two-thirds of all physician visits result in the patient receiving a prescription, yet the FDA estimates 30% to 50% of patients do not follow their treatment regimens. And many patients are at risk of adverse drug interactions.

"In August, U.S. News & World Report reported that one-third of the 140 pharmacists who were presented with prescriptions for two drugs known to adversely interact did not warn consumers of the potentially lethal combination. (That report built on an earlier, similar study published in JAMA).

"Improper drug use costs the United States \$20 billion a year -- \$75 billion when indirect costs are counted, the FDA says."

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see the connection. We have almost two-thirds (66%) of all medical patients on drugs, and 11% of their children on drugs. One has to wonder why the children are so slow to follow the bad example of their parents.

Despite the fact that this trend is extremely unhealthy, it puts a \$75 billion strain on the U.S. economy EVERY YEAR. A strain this country can ill afford.

According to the latest figures from the American Chiropractic Association, the average annual gross income for a DC is \$225,783.¹ Assuming 50,000 practicing chiropractors, the entire

profession doesn't earn much over \$11 billion per year. The cost for prescription drug morbidity and mortality² is almost seven times the cost per year of chiropractic care for every U.S. citizen who currently sees a DC for anything!

So while the pharmaceutical sales force is pushing MDs to addict their patients, the street pushers are cashing in on their money in the children's market. The off-shore drug cartel may seem powerful, but not in comparison to the on-shore drug cartel.

And the American public pays for it twice. We pay for the drug and for the morbidity/mortality expenses that go along with drug use.

This information alone should in itself be a compelling argument against the addition of "drug therapy" to the practice of chiropractic. Amazingly enough, of the over \$75 billion per year cost of drug morbidity/mortality, almost \$2 billion³ of it is spent on "additional prescriptions"!

As we begin 1997, our efforts to be a drugless profession need to become our platform to change the way people think about their health care. The care of your patients should include responsible efforts to educate them to the numerous and very real dangers of all drugs and the advantages of living drug-free.

Some day there will be a backlash against the unnecessary drugging of patients. When it happens, we need to be recognized as the leaders of this movement.

References

1. Goertz C. Summary of the 1995 ACA Annual Statistical Survey on Chiropractic Practice. JACA, June 1996.
2. Johnson JA, Bootman JL. Drug-related morbidity and mortality. Arch Intern Med. 1995;155:1949-1956. (Also presented in graph form in Sept. 12, 1996 DC).
3. Ibid.

Donald M. Petersen Jr., BS, HCD(hc), FICC(h)
Editor/Publisher of Dynamic Chiropractic

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