

A Victim's Perspective?

Editorial Staff

There are certain realities that crop up in everyday life. As an attorney once said with a wry smile, "Cars crash, boats sink and planes fall out of the sky, that's life." Another reality is that health care is not perfect.

As Chicago Sun Times reporter Thomas Moore stated in his book *Deadly Medicine*,¹ "Medical mistakes in United States Hospitals kill 168,000 persons each year." As stated in an editorial in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*²:

"Also in 1991, the Harvard Medical Practice Study³ reported the results of a population-based study of iatrogenic injury in patients hospitalized in New York State in 1984.^{3,4} Nearly 4% of patients suffered an injury that prolonged their hospital stay or resulted in measurable disability. For New York state, this equalled 98,609 patients in 1984. Nearly 14% of these injuries were fatal. If these rates are typical of the United States, then 180,000 people die each year partly as a result of iatrogenic injury, the equivalent of three jumbo-jet crashes every 2 days."

Looking at pharmaceuticals, the number of "adverse drug events" in US hospitals is reported at 7.3 percent.⁵ This translates to one out of every 14 patients.

Turning the focus to chiropractic care, between 1991-1993, there were 96 closed claims for stroke submitted to the National Chiropractic Mutual Insurance Company (NCMIC). Of these, only 61 resulted in an award against the company, or about 20 claims per year. Assuming that NCMIC insures approximately 50 percent of the DCs in the US, we can extrapolate approximately 40 cases of stroke per year.⁶ Forty cases among the over 20 million treated patients is the equivalent of one per 500,000 patients.

In the face of this data, a new book, *Chiropractic: The Victim's Perspective*, has just hit the bookstores. The book is authored by George Magner, a patient who claims "loss of the full sensation of touch, neck and shoulder pain, a feeling of pins and needles in his left foot, tinnitus, and the continuing pain of his original complaint."

The book is the newest addition to Prometheus Books' Consumer Health Library, a series edited by long time chiropractic critic Stephen Barrett, MD. Consulting on the book and writing the foreword is William T. Jarvis, PhD, another longstanding foe of chiropractic. Charles E. DuVall, Jr., DC, president of the National Association of Chiropractic Medicine (NACM), formally known as the Orthopractic Manipulation Society, also was used as a consultant. Drs. DuVall, Jarvis and Barrett are members of the National Council Against Health Fraud (NCAHF).

The book begins with the author's own unfortunate experience, followed by anecdotal accounts of the "other victims." The book then continues through a series of 17 chapters:

1. How I Became Involved
2. A Brief History of Chiropractic

3. The Elusive "Subluxation"
4. Chiropractic Education and Licensure
5. Questionable Marketing Tactics
6. "Preventative Maintenance"
7. Dubious Diagnostics and Therapeutics
8. Nutrition-Related Nonsense
9. Should Chiropractors Treat Children?
10. Insurance Abuses
11. The AMA Antitrust Suit
12. Deceptions Behind Recent Headlines
13. Research Considerations
14. Significant Risks Remain
15. Informed Consent Is Needed
16. Real Freedom of Choice
17. Can Chiropractic Be Reformed?

Appendix A: Another Victim Speaks Out

Appendix B: Glossary

Appendix C: References

In reviewing the text, the information and presentation were all too familiar. Not surprisingly this book has the same tenor of chiropractic exposes we've witnessed in Consumer Reports, on "20/20," and other numerous examinations of chiropractic that have involved Drs. Barrett, Jarvis and DuVall Jr. One cannot help but suspect that the NACM and the NCAHF merely emptied their files for author Wagner to organize, with Dr. Barrett doing the editing.

But the burning issue is one of perspective. Certainly there could be thousands of such books by medical "victims" (considerable more, if the dead could speak).

The author begins his book by telling the reader: "Two medical doctors and a physical therapist could not help me..." Now, as has been the case with most of the "investigations" into chiropractic that involve this type of presentation, an entire profession is damned by a single incident, statistically insignificant when compared to medical "victims" and the stories they could tell.

Just once the public should be presented with the full picture. People are looking for the best health care, but wondering what to believe. The constant regurgitation of the NACM/NCAHF agenda does not serve the best interests of the public.

References

1. Moore T. *Deadly Medicine*. Simon & Schuster, 1995.
2. Leape LL. Error in medicine. *JAMA* 1994;272:1851-1857.
3. Brennan TZ, Leape LL, Laird N, et al. Incidence of adverse events and negligence in hospitalized patients; results of the Harvard Medical Practice Study I. *New England Journal of Medicine* 1991;324:370-376.
4. Leape LL, Brennan TA, Laird N, et al. The nature of adverse events in hospitalized patients; results of the Harvard Medical Practice Study II. *New England Journal of Medicine* 1991;

324:377-384.

5. Prevention of Drug Related Complications, Harvard School of Public Health, September 22, 1994.
6. Interview with Louis Sportelli, DC, President, National Chiropractic Mutual Insurance Company.

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