

"The Crusaders" Twist the Public's Perception of Chiropractic

TWO TRAGIC STROKES, ATTRIBUTED TO CERVICAL ADJUSTMENT, STOKED THE MEDIA CAMPAIGN TO INSTILL FEAR OF CHIROPRACTORS

Editorial Staff

The "Twist of Fate" segment on NBC's program "The Crusaders" (Saturday May 14th, 7-8:00 p.m. PST), began with the announcer asking, "Ever think of seeing a chiropractor? Well, you could walk in and never walk out."

Diana Nyad began her report on chiropractic cervical adjustments by visiting with Ted Layman and his wife, Mary, an active mother of four who according to her attorney had an adjustment and went into a coma. When she came out of the coma, she had permanent brain damage. She had to learn to walk again. She cannot speak and must be fed via tube.

A second patient, a 40-year-old professor who wished to remain unidentified on camera, suffered a stroke shortly after a cervical adjustment. He is paralyzed and can barely speak.

Reporter Nyad spoke of the "mounting evidence that chiropractic neck adjustments can cause stroke..." and that chiropractors generally don't warn their patients about the risks.

The Chiropractic Report was referenced on the program as stating that stroke occurs from cervical adjustment in one in one million treatments. Neuroradiologist Henry Priebe of Orange, California, told "The Crusaders" that such statistics are not meaningful, and adds: "If it happens to you, it's 100 percent."

Reporter Nyad adds: "But neurological experts we talked with say it occurs as often as once in 10,000 treatments..." Reporter Nyad gives no basis for this statement except this quote from a paper published last year in the Journal of Neurosurgery: "Neck adjustments should not be done at all"; that "the risk of stroke is unacceptably high."

One of the people contacted by "The Crusaders" was Neurologist Scott Haldeman, DC, MD, PhD, of Santa Ana, California. Unfortunately, Dr. Haldeman was never interviewed, even though he is currently involved in probably the only comprehensive study on the risks of cervical manipulation. "DC" asked Dr. Haldeman about the likelihood of stroke following cervical adjustment:

"The most frequent assessment is one in 400,000. Even the researchers at Stanford published a likelihood of one in 500,000, while the Canadian study stated one in three million. Most chiropractic researchers take a middle-of-the-road position of one in one million.

"Our study shows that the literature is extremely poor, mostly anecdotal reports or retrospective surveys. It is not possible to come up with an accurate number at this time. We are in the process of conducting research on a national basis with large populations of doctors and patients to obtain a more accurate number."

Dr. Priebraum however tells "The Crusaders," "The literature is full of cases -- chiropractic adjustment leading to stroke."

Chiropractor Dan Futch of Wisconsin states on the program that it is a doctor's "ethical and moral responsibility" to inform patients of the risk of stroke from cervical adjustment.

"The Crusaders" have asked California state Senator Diane Watson, who heads the state Senate Committee on Health, to hold formal hearings on an "informed consent law," a law that would require DCs to warn patients of the risk of cervical adjustment. Senator Watson replied: "I think it's our responsibility as legislators to look at what this indicates for policy." "The Crusaders" reported that Senator Watson had "agreed" to hearings on the matter, although it wasn't clear if a hearing would actually be held. "The Crusaders" speculated that if informed consent became law in California, other states would soon follow its lead.

Ms. Nyad ended the report with this disclaimer: "Look, it's important that we stress here that we are in no way condemning chiropractors. We know chiropractic medicine improves the lives of millions of people every day. We simply believe it's your right to know the risks involved before undergoing this particular neck adjustment."

With this latest TV reportage, it's clear that chiropractic is under seige. While coincidences are everyday occurrences, it is a difficult stretch to believe that the recent assault on chiropractic in the media (Wall Street Journal, "20/20," The AP wire story on stroke following manipulation, "The Crusaders," and the upcoming Consumer's Report article), falls under the category of random acts.

It's ironic that chiropractic, with a record of nearly 100 years of safe, conservative health care, is being targeted as dangerous, with testimonials from MDs leading the way. It's interesting to note that nowhere in "The Crusaders" program was it mentioned that chiropractors are not the only practitioners doing cervical adjustments.

There is a clear, well directed campaign to instill uncertainty and fear, and spread disinformation about chiropractic. It's an insidious propaganda that is being spoon feed to the public at the height of the debate over the course of health care in this country.

But the history of chiropractic is a story of overcoming adversity. Resiliency and chiropractic are synonymous, and chiropractic, as always, will survive and prosper.

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