

Under Scrutiny

CBS LOOKS AT CHIROPRACTIC PEDIATRICS

Editorial Staff

NBC Questions Unsubstantiated Treatment Protocols

With the continuing emphasis on national health care reform, the chiropractic profession faces what all viable health care professions are facing: media scrutiny. While the CBS and NBC networks focused their cameras on two different aspects of the chiropractic profession, both news segments expressed concerns of chiropractic's primary care role and its anecdotal claims of treatment efficacy.

CBS "Eye on America"

The June 2nd CBS prime-time news program "Eye on America" (6:30 p.m. PT) looked at chiropractic pediatrics.

The show centered around the pediatric practices of Drs. David and Deborah Levinson. The two chiropractors were filmed giving adjustments to several children, including a seven-week-old baby. The segment contained two testimonials by parents. The father of an asthmatic boy exclaimed:

"It's (chiropractic) phenomenal. Maybe it doesn't work for everybody, but it flat worked for him. I'd swear up and down on it."

The issue of misdiagnosis was brought up in two cases where DCs had failed to diagnose pediatric problems. One of those cases was nearly fatal.

The report included an interview with long-time chiropractic critic Charles DuVall Jr., DC, (please see an exclusive interview with Dr. DuVall on page XX of this issue). Dr. DuVall is president of the National Association for Chiropractic Medicine and a director of the National Council Against Health Fraud (NCAHF). He stated on CBS:

"Infants are not all solid bone. I mean, they're still developing. So all this wackin' and crackin' is totally unnecessary."

"Can harm be done to children?", CBS inquired:

"Absolutely," replied Dr. DuVall.

Besides parading a few MDs to add balance and to express their concerns with chiropractic, the segment brought up some important issues. While the parental testimonials were very much in favor of treatment, they fell short of addressing questions regarding validity. Once again, lack of chiropractic research was exposed.

But the underlying issue was even more important: Are DCs qualified to be primary care providers for children?

The instances of missed diagnosis reported on CBS can easily be presented for every profession.

The Harvard Medical Practice Study II reported that of its sample of 30,195 patients hospitalized in New York in 1984, 8.1 percent involved "diagnostic mishap," with negligence the cause of 75 percent of those cases.¹

But what about the educational standards for chiropractors? This information could have been presented to reinforce the chiropractor's place as a primary care provider, but unfortunately was not included.

NBC "News Today"

NBC's segment on chiropractic aired June 4th during the second hour of the morning news program. It was the last installment of their series on alternative medicine.

NBC looked at the treatment of children with Duchenne muscular dystrophy at the Ward Chiropractic Orthopedic office in Long Beach, California. The clinic uses a controversial treatment known as stressology, a procedure developed by Lowell Ward, DC. There are approximately 150 DCs that are practicing some form or aspect of this technique.

NBC, like CBS, offered the comparison between parental testimonials and lack of objective research, only this time the testimonials were not nearly as positive, and the criticisms were more pointed.

The program revolved around 13-year-old Eric Knapp, shown in a wheelchair:

"The second day of treatment, I went and got a new pair of shoes. I think we threw away my braces."

Eric's father, Lonnie, appraised his son's dire situation:

"There's no alternative. There's nothing else being offered to us. When you are looking at a disease like this, the progression is so fast. He has very little time and we need to consider time and go after something that has some possibilities for him."

Dr. Leon Charash, spokesperson for the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) was very critical:

"The issue is to ascertain whether the claim of benefit is confirmed or not confirmed. We have offered to examine children objectively before and after. They (the Ward Clinic) declined. We have suggested to them that they carry out the study the way everyone on earth does a study. The only valid way. Not to hear some anecdotal comment made by a family that went there because they have a need which drew them there."

While Eric's parents insist that his improvement has been dramatic, the question of validity remains constant. And while Dr. Lowell Ward denies that the MDA ever offered to work with them or conduct pre and postexaminations, he admits that objective study of his work has yet to be done (please see an exclusive interview with Dr. Ward on page XX of this issue).

As chiropractic care continues to grow in prominence, the public and the media will intensify their focus and their scrutiny. Other health care professions will be critical as well, particularly in areas where the chiropractic profession can only supply anecdotal testimony, areas where chiropractic has failed to conduct the appropriate research.

One news commentator asked if the benefits of chiropractic care were "real or imagined." The substantial criticisms leveled at chiropractic's lack of research were reported in both television news programs. But the success of chiropractic care, when coupled with the "failure of experimental high technology medicine," is what appeals to most parents.

Objective research may be the last blockade preventing the chiropractic profession from being considered by the public as the mainstream, primary care profession that it is.

Reference:

1. Leape L, Brennan T, Laird N, Lawthers A, Localio R, Barnes B, Hebert L, Newhouse J, Weiler P, Hiatt H: The nature of adverse events in hospitalized patients: Results of the Harvard medical practice study II. N Engl J Med 1991;324:377-84.

JULY 1993