

It's a Sad Day

Peter Fysh, DC

It's a sad day when emergency legislation is enacted to prevent the public from receiving an effective treatment for a health condition, just because a newspaper reporter and a legislative group think that the treatment might be dangerous.

It's a sad day when a group of concerned chiropractors cannot choose to acquaint the people of California with the truth of the laws relating to immunization, without incurring political threats to disband their registration board.

Recently, emergency regulations were passed by the California Board of Chiropractic Examiners to effectively prevent chiropractors from telling parents that they have an alternative treatment for their children's infectious diseases; that they have an alternative to the often failed medical care for conditions such as otitis media and tonsillitis. (Editor's note: see "Calif. Board Adopts Emergency Regulations under Threat" on the front page of the Sept. 1, 1993 issue.)

Childhood ear infection is one condition for which chiropractic care has a growing body of parental supporters. The amazing fact is that there is no evidence that chiropractic care for childhood infectious diseases can cause any harm, unless of course you accept unsubstantiated newspaper reports as evidence. Yet there is a growing body of case reports which suggest that chiropractic care is not only effective but, in certain instances, has been shown to be superior to the medical alternatives (see "Chiropractic Management of Otitis Media" in the June 4 issue).

Infectious Diseases

According to a recent national survey, infectious disease in the form of earache, or otitis media, is the most common condition for which children are treated by chiropractors and accounts for 11.3 percent of all cases seen in chiropractic offices for children under the age of 15 years (see "Kids Need Chiropractic Too -- What For?" in the December 4, 1992 issue).

Parents in the United States are choosing, in increasing numbers, to bring their children to chiropractors for evaluation and treatment of common childhood disorders. Presumably this is based upon referrals from other parents and upon the child's satisfactory response to the treatment offered.

Many letters of support have been received in this office from parents who are delighted with their children's response to chiropractic care. Many of these letters are from parents who talk of rapid improvement in their children's condition, after months and sometimes years of failure of their children to respond to traditional medical treatment.

At a clinical level, the frequent and sometimes dramatic improvement in children with chronic recurrent otitis media and tonsillitis, seen following one or two light spinal adjustments, adds weight to the suggestion that the spine has a significant role in restoring normal physiological function to the body. The therapy involves no more than a light finger tip adjustment to the upper cervical spinal vertebrae. The fact that these spinal adjustments have significantly fewer side effects than vaccination, for example, seems to have been overlooked in the haste to protect the

public, especially the children, from the perceived dangers of chiropractic.

This trend in health care is disturbing. If chiropractors have a safe and effective treatment for infectious diseases such as otitis media, a treatment that in many cases has been shown to be effective when antibiotic therapy has failed, then surely the health care community has a responsibility to children and parents to continue to research, develop and provide that care.

Rather than trying to prevent chiropractors from treating patients with infectious disease, the legislators and the medical profession would do well to try to learn what chiropractors have to offer, in the best interest of the public.

Chiropractors' Training

At an academic level, chiropractors are trained in the skills of accurate diagnosis, including the diagnosis of infectious diseases. Chiropractors are also trained to evaluate the patient's condition with respect to concurrent medical care and medication status. In this respect, chiropractors can recognize those patients and forms of infectious disease which might require immediate response by referral to another health care practitioner. To do otherwise, would be considered below acceptable standards of practice.

Vaccination

The question of vaccination was also addressed in the emergency legislation. In 1992, an advertisement in a San Diego newspaper advised parents that a "personal belief" exemption exists in California, an exemption which gives parents the option not to be forced to have their children vaccinated if immunization is against their personal belief. This option is provided in Section 3885 of the California Exemptions to Immunization law. The interpretation of this advertisement appears to have been misconstrued as suggesting that chiropractors are offering spinal adjustments as an alternative to immunization.

The fact that a group of concerned citizens, which included some DCs, chose to acquaint the people of California with the facts of the law relating to immunization and to their right as parents to choose to have their children immunized, according to their personal belief, is nothing more than a freedom of speech issue. Surely, freedom of speech needs to be protected regardless of one's philosophical position on the question of immunization. To respond to this advertisement with an emergency regulation making it unprofessional conduct for a chiropractor to advertise or offer to substitute a spinal adjustment for a vaccination is, in the opinion of this columnist, an illogical and irrational response. There is no question that the intent of the advertisement has been misunderstood.

Summary

Chiropractic is an alternative health care choice to traditional medicine. Despite years of denial and rejection from the other health care professions, chiropractic has been proven to be superior, for the most common forms of low back pain, to all other methods of treatment (see Appropriateness of Spinal Manipulation for Low Back Pain, RAND Corp., 1991). Research has finally proven the validity of chiropractic care for low back problems. But what if one single treatment complication at the hands of a chiropractor had evoked an emergency regulation to make it unprofessional conduct for chiropractors to treat such problems?

More children come to chiropractors seeking treatment for upper respiratory infection than for any other condition. Many of these children would still be suffering from recurrent bouts of ear infection and may have undergone expensive procedures having drainage tubes inserted in their

ears, if it were not for chiropractic care. To enact emergency regulations which would deny children and effective alternative treatment, based upon an unsubstantiated newspaper report, is a sad indictment of the future progress of pediatric health care.

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