

Let's Not Close Any Doors

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We can all agree that chiropractic needs more research, not only with low back ailments but in the other areas of health care. The growing anecdotal evidence showing the positive impact of chiropractic adjustments improving the quality of life suggests that research should include the gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, respiratory, and nervous-related ailments.

What about studies for headaches? We have a massive amount of anecdotal evidence which shows we are literally blowing the competition away with results, but unfortunately it is not scientifically acceptable. I am absolutely convinced that once we complete some properly done, pragmatic, prospective, randomized controlled trials on the effectiveness of chiropractic on headaches, compared to other treatments, the results will pale the low back studies by comparison. The results can be so profound that our profession can become known as "headache doctors" instead of "backache doctors."

In the near future, insurance companies and governmental bodies will only pay claims for clinically proven methods. All else will be considered "experimental" and they won't pay any chiropractic or medical claims without clinical proof of effectiveness. This means that unless we establish scientifically accepted, clinical trials that chiropractic is clinically effective for headaches, or whatever other ailments, it will not be covered.

I recall the time I had a patient come to my office for a neck/back problem; as he was driving home afterward, he noticed his vision was blurred. He took his glasses off and noticed that he could see clearly again. He discarded his glasses and never wore them again. When his friends saw him they would remark how he looked "different." He'd explain that he received a chiropractic adjustment and that since then has not needed the glasses. He would get such strange looks from his friends that he finally decided that he would no longer explain what happened.

In another instance, a patient, after receiving a chiropractic adjustment, remarked that his hearing improved so remarkably that he discarded his old hearing aid and canceled his order for a new one.

In still a third instance, I am currently treating a young man who has blurred vision and has been through extensive tests; his ophthalmologist cannot find any basis for his problem. The young man decided to try chiropractic on an "experimental" basis. At the time of this writing he has indicated that he can now read street signs he could not read before. He has also been following his own progress with some reading charts at a measured distance. He has observed a marked improvement in a very short time.

Would we be justified in advertising that we cure deafness and visual problems? Of course not. It would be grossly improper and misleading by any standard, and regardless of the truth of the matter, it would invite serious and justifiable criticism of chiropractic. Unfortunately, I believe this is where some of the early and perhaps overzealous chiropractors got into trouble and embarrassed the entire profession. The key lies in keeping our results in proper perspective. We should not expect modern society to accept anecdotal evidence as being acceptable, but we must commit ourselves to scientifically proving what we have experienced in our offices.

On the other extreme of the spectrum we now have a small group of chiropractors who are rejecting everything that chiropractic can do except for limiting themselves to simple backaches. The medical community is giving this small extremist group recognition far out of proportion to their small number by referring to them as "scientifically-oriented reformers of chiropractic." The medics love it because this group would totally abandon their rights to health care except within a narrow realm. In reality, this group consisting of perhaps 50 or so members and are the most "unscientific" chiropractors of all. They lack curiosity or an investigative mind. They represent the worst element in chiropractic. If everyone had their mentality we would still be living in caves and carrying clubs.

Every reasonable scientist or researcher will agree that it is totally improper to condemn an idea until there is adequate proof that it doesn't work. In fact, some ideas have been proved to be correct even after "scientific" research showed it could not be done. Science should not be confused with truth. For example, scientists "proved" that the A-4 Skyhawk could not fly because it was "too heavy," yet it not only flies but carries three times its own body weight.

Chiropractic is in an even better position; no one in the scientific community has ever been able to show that chiropractic does not work. No one! In fact, during our trial against the AMA we advised many of the witnesses in advance that they would be asked to show any proof anywhere that chiropractic does not work. They had time to consult with all of their scientists and researchers to come up with one shred of evidence. Time and again these witnesses were asked the question after being forewarned and the answers were always the same -- they had no evidence that chiropractic does not work. None! That says a lot.

It appears that this small group, so starved for acceptance by the medical community, would deliberately spit in the face of all of their professors. If any of these misguided chiropractors are reading this article, I would hope they come to their senses and realize the harm they are doing to rational evaluation and utilization of health care. This does not imply that we have all the answers to support our opinions, but that we cannot -- and must not -- close any doors to reasonable research. Their attitudes reflect blind, dogmatic, irresponsible condemnation where there should be open, thoughtful, objective scientifically oriented evaluation and observation.

It was sad to hear a chiropractor on network television say that chiropractic cannot correct asthma. I would challenge her to show us one study which supports her statement. There are none. If there was, you can be sure the defendants in our lawsuit would have brought them out in the trial. I'm sure they had consulted with all of their top educators and researchers for an example and they came up empty.

I shall never forget what Dr. Leonard Fay from National College told us once in a class he was giving on correct chiropractic communication. He gave us some "nevers." First, we never, never ever treat ailments per se. We treat the patient for the ailment. Second, we never paint ourselves into the corner with absolute words or sentences. The word "may" eliminates many problems and does not take away from the credibility of a statement; indeed, it may enhance the statement's credibility.

Dr. Fay demonstrated the pitfall of treating "ailments" instead of "patients for the ailments." Playing the role of "devil's advocate" he was able to show the class how he could easily destroy our credibility through cross examination if we treated "ailments." After he showed us the "nevers" he could no longer discredit any of us as long as we followed the rules. By the way, these classes influenced me more than any I had ever attended. It prompted me to write *Chiropractic Speaks Out* which initially was written as a speaker's bureau outline and not a book; later it became a book.

When speaking in terms of which ailments generally fall within the realm of chiropractic care, we must always indicate that individual progress varies from "condition to condition, from patient to patient, and from time to time." We must conclude by emphasizing that we cannot be more specific than this since it would be misleading. Critics or adversaries will try to goad us into committing ourselves to a specific limitation for a specific ailment. Once they do this, you become vulnerable to being damned if you do and damned if you don't. Remember this pitfall. If every chiropractor simply knew these vital points, we would have far fewer problems as to what we claim to do, and our credibility would increase.

While we cannot overclaim, we also cannot limit our profession without proper research to establish chiropractic's potential. Overclaiming will only embarrass and discredit us. Taking the "easy way out" and renouncing our ability to help other conditions without adequate research will close doors and inhibit chiropractic's potential. We need to give our profession every opportunity to fulfill its potential by leaving all doors open to curiosity, investigation, and the search for truth.

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