

Another Media Assault on Chiropractic

BERKELEY WELLNESS LETTER REVIVES OLD MYTHS

Editorial Staff

These days, the popular media's coverage of chiropractic seems eerily similar to Forrest Gump's observations on life: Until you read the whole story, "You never know what you're going to get." One day, best-selling publications such as *Prevention* and *New York* magazine, and well-known Web sites like DrWeil.com, carry positive stories on chiropractic and praise the value of chiropractic adjustments for back and neck pain^{1,2}; the next day, an aviation industry magazine compares an office run by a chiropractor and other practitioners to "a one-stop voodoo shop," and the Wall Street Journal takes a backhanded swipe at the profession.^{3,4}

The latest round of anti-chiropractic sentiment appears in the February 2004 issue of the *UC Berkeley Wellness Letter*, a popular print/electronic newsletter with a subscription base of more than 350,000 in North America. At issue is an article titled, "Should You Consult a Chiropractor?"⁵ From the beginning, the attitude toward (or in this case, against) chiropractic becomes clear; the opening paragraph asserts that "mainstream medicine, along with much of the public, views chiropractors as marginal or ineffectual or worse," without providing any supporting evidence for that opinion.

The article continues with a brief history of the profession - referring to the manipulation of force as "bone-cracking" - then follows with an outline of how the chiropractic approach to patient care has changed in the past 109 years. Some chiropractors "treat anything and everything from asthmas to PMS to headaches - whatever might be bothering you," claims the author, adding that others use tests to diagnose "bogus nutritional deficiencies" and other illnesses. Several lines later, the writer arrives at a brash conclusion: "Given such a range of approaches, it is hard to know what you might encounter when you visit your local chiropractor."

The article does include few positive statements about chiropractic, acknowledging the 1994 Agency for Healthcare Policy and Research (AHCPR) report on the benefits of acute low back pain; however, it quickly returns to its anti-chiropractic stance, rehashing statements made by the *Journal of the Canadian Medical Association* regarding the effectiveness of spinal manipulation, and alleging that manipulation of the neck can cause everything from mild discomfort and headaches to nerve damage and possible stroke. "And yet, few patients are warned about potential bad outcomes," the author comments.

The article concludes with several "precautions" for patients considering chiropractic care, including:

- See your regular physician first for a diagnosis and possible treatment. Ask him to refer you to a chiropractor, if you want to try one. Apparently, the author of the article fails to realize that in many states, patients are free to see a chiropractor without a referral from a medical doctor.
- Don't agree to full-spine or full-body X-rays. The article alleges that these procedures "expose you to unnecessary amounts of radiation and have little diagnostic value for soft-tissue problems."

- Don't agree to "maintenance" care involving repeat visits over long periods. According to the article, if a patient's symptoms don't disappear over time, "some other kind of care, such as physical therapy" is required. Apparently, "some other therapy" doesn't include chiropractic.
- Don't agree to neck manipulation. Considering the medical profession's recent attempts to classify chiropractic neck manipulation as potentially life-threatening,⁶⁻⁸ this blanket recommendation comes as no surprise.
- If you want to take dietary supplements, follow the advice of your primary-care physician. According to the Council on Chiropractic Education, classes in nutrition and dietetics are part of the curriculum required of all accredited doctor of chiropractic programs in the United States. Additionally, the latest version of the Job Analysis of Chiropractic states that 90.4 percent of practicing chiropractors utilize nutritional counseling, therapy or supplementation as part of their practice. The bottom line: Most chiropractors are well-qualified to provide advice on nutrition and dietary supplements, and many of them discuss these therapies with their patients.

Interestingly enough, in researching this article, *Dynamic Chiropractic* discovered that the editorial board of the *UC Berkeley Wellness Letter* consists of 14 individuals, nine of whom are medical doctors. No doctors of chiropractic serve on the editorial board.

Because of "Should You Consult a Chiropractor?" and articles like it, untold numbers of people may be disillusioned about the true benefits of chiropractic care. The profession and its leaders need to seize on opportunities such as this and publicize the proven benefits chiropractic provides to millions of grateful patients each year.

References

1. More kudos for chiropractic in Prevention magazine. *Dynamic Chiropractic*, June 30, 2003. www.chiroweb.com/archives/21/14/08.html.
2. Media outlets praise chiropractic. *Dynamic Chiropractic*, Feb. 10, 2003. www.chiroweb.com/archives/21/04/14.html.
3. Plane and Pilot editorial grounds chiropractic. *Dynamic Chiropractic*, March 24, 2003. www.chiroweb.com/archives/21/07/26.html.
4. Wall Street Journal questions chiropractic ... again. *Dynamic Chiropractic*, July 14, 2003. www.chiroweb.com/archives/21/15/25.html.
5. Should you consult a chiropractor? *UC Berkeley Wellness Letter*, February 2004.
6. Revisiting the cervical spine manipulation/stroke debate. *Dynamic Chiropractic*, April 21, 2003. www.chiroweb.com/archives/21/14/01.html.
7. Norris JW, Beletsky V, Nadareishvilli ZG, Canadian Stroke Consortium. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 2000;163(1):38-40.
8. Jury finds death of Canadian patient "accidental." *Dynamic Chiropractic*, Feb. 26, 2004. www.chiroweb.com/archives/22/05/11.html.

MARCH 2004