

What Is the Secret to Chiropractic Unity?

Kent Greenawalt

What if chiropractic had a secret weapon - one that could help increase the number of patients that we see, while at the same time, educate those patients about chiropractic? What if this secret weapon also could increase respect for our profession? And most importantly, what if it could bring doctors with conflicting views together and help us achieve more unity in our profession?

We already have this secret weapon in our possession. It's the research that proves that chiropractic care is safe and effective. We all hear complaints that only one in 10 Americans is a chiropractic patient. This is no one's fault but our own. We've allowed chiropractic to remain the best-kept secret in health care for far too long. The goal of the Campaign for Chiropractic is to reveal the secret of chiropractic to the public. One of the best ways we can spread the chiropractic message is by keeping people informed about the latest chiropractic research.

Ever since the birth of chiropractic, we have been struggling to validate our profession. It is a challenge for us to motivate people to use chiropractic when the vast majority of them have no clue what it is that we do or how we can help them. Most people learn about chiropractic through the mainstream media, and unfortunately, media coverage of chiropractic is more likely to be negative than positive. How often do you read articles that portray chiropractic as unscientific or even dangerous? How many articles about chiropractic are unflattering, biased or just plain wrong? And how many times have you heard someone say chiropractic has no merit or that chiropractors aren't real doctors?

It's up to us to inform the public about the research on the benefits of chiropractic. We can't wait for the mainstream media to help us, and we can't expect the public to go searching for positive information about chiropractic care. Promoting chiropractic research will only have positive effects on our profession. Hearing about the newest research reassures patients and makes them feel confident about choosing chiropractic care.

We also need to inform the people who aren't chiropractic patients about all of the research supporting chiropractic. Seeing the evidence that chiropractic care works could be the push they need to make the decision to see a chiropractor. Research validates our profession and allows us to stand up to our critics and say, "Chiropractic works and I can prove it."

Start by familiarizing yourself with research that is most relevant to your patients. The majority of chiropractic patients are seeking relief from a painful condition such as low back pain, neck pain, or headaches, but a number of people see chiropractors to increase their overall level of wellness or even enhance athletic performance. In fact the majority of all professional sports teams have chiropractors on staff. Educating your patients about chiropractic makes them more likely to follow their course of care and to continue using chiropractic in the future.

Chiropractic Care and Pain

There is a great deal of research on the effect of chiropractic care on pain, especially back pain.

Back pain is a significant problem, affecting between 60%-80% of the U.S. population¹ and costing

an estimated \$100 billion in annual health care.² Study after study has proved that chiropractic care is effective for reducing back pain, neck pain, and headaches.

- A 2000 study showed that chiropractic care provided significant improvement for patients with mechanical low back and/or neck pain. There was a 52.5% reduction in pain and a 52.9% reduction in disability for the low back patients.³ The neck pain patients experienced a 53.8% reduction in pain and a 48.4% reduction in disability.³
- A 2002 study found that the combination of chiropractic adjustments and exercise was effective at reducing neck pain.⁴
- In 1999, Tuchin studied the effect of chiropractic care on migraine headaches. Every patient in the study experienced significant improvement in migraine frequency, visual analogue scale (VAS) readings, disability, and medication use.⁵

Doesn't the public deserve to know there is a way to care for pain that doesn't involve surgery or drugs with potentially harmful side-effects? Shouldn't everyone know that there is a safe, natural and effective alternative? Don't people need to know how much we can help them?

Wellness and Chiropractic Care

A growing amount of research has shown that chiropractic care can increase wellness as well as reduce pain. Only 8% of patients see a chiropractor for wellness care,⁶ but exposing the public to all of the positive research on chiropractic can help us increase that number.

- A 1999 Denmark study comparing the effects of spinal manipulation and dimethicone on infantile colic found that colic symptoms were reduced by 67% in infants who received manipulation.⁷ Colic symptoms were only reduced by 38% in the dimethicone group.⁷
- A study on the effect of spinal manipulation on fibromyalgia showed that chiropractic care improved sleep quality by 63.5% and lessened fatigue by 74.8%, in addition to reducing pain by 77.2%.⁸
- A trial conducted on asthma patients who underwent spinal manipulation found that they showed higher blood serum levels of IgA and decreased levels of cortisol, which indicate increased immunological capacities.⁹

Imagine what our profession could become if the public was aware of the wide range of problems chiropractors can help. Imagine if everyone knew that you could help more than just back pain. Imagine what would happen if more people wanted to get adjusted to maintain their health, instead of seeing you only when they are in pain. Research can help make it possible.

Additional Research

This article can only cover a fraction of the existing research. But my real goal isn't to give you all of the research that's out there; my goal is to get you to think about the difference this research could make if we shared it with the public. It's also important to inform patients about the research indicating that chiropractic patients are happy with their care and that chiropractic is cost-effective. A 2000 study on back pain compared chiropractic care and medical care and found that 90% of the chiropractic patients were satisfied with their care, compared with only 52% of the medical patients.¹⁰ Another study found that chiropractic adjustments were more effective than physiotherapy and general practitioner care for neck pain, and its costs were only one-third of the costs of the other treatments.¹¹ We have a responsibility to let the public know how great chiropractic is.

What Research Can Do for Us

It's crucial for you to share the current research findings with your patients as part of your patient education efforts. When patients understand that chiropractic can help many different problems, you may be able to increase internal referrals. Informing patients about the latest research lets them know we can help them and their loved ones. A great place for you and your patients to find the latest chiropractic research is www.ChiropracticResearchReview.com/subscribe. This web site has the latest research on topics such as clinical chiropractic, musculoskeletal health, pediatrics, senior health, and more.

Research can do more than attract new chiropractic patients; it can raise the reputation of our entire profession. Focusing on the research also will help us unify chiropractic. Chiropractors have always had many different and conflicting opinions, but conflict only divides the profession and confuses potential patients. When we fail to send consistent messages to the public, people don't know which faction of chiropractic to believe and they begin to doubt whether chiropractic can help them. If we get behind the research and determine which conditions can be helped by chiropractic care, we can stand united in defense of our profession.

The time for unity is now. Chiropractic research gives us the solid foundation we need to defend and promote our profession. Nothing is more powerful than the truth - and the truth is that chiropractic is safe and effective. We need to be proud of what chiropractic can do and share this information with the world. Let's make sure everyone knows that chiropractic care gets results! Together, we can make this work.

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Author's note: The Campaign for Chiropractic is currently seeking volunteers to act as Foundation Spokespersons, who will help raise funds and answer questions about the Foundation for Chiropractic Progress. If you are interested, contact Gene Veno at gveno@foundation4cp.com or via fax at 717-724-4563. Donations can be mailed to:
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