

What Matters Most to Your Patients

Donald M. Petersen Jr., BS, HCD(hc), FICC(h), Publisher

A recent study looked at how satisfied your patients are with their care and what contributes to their satisfaction.¹ This study updates previous information and provides us with a good look at how current and previous patients view the care they've received. The authors "collected data over the telephone from a random sample of 400 adults who had used chiropractic services and 400 [adults] who had never used chiropractic care." Interestingly enough, this is what the researchers found when they asked chiropractic users when they had last visited their DC:

% of people who have ever visited a chiropractor (n = 400)

Most recent visit to chiropractor

Last week	12.0%
Last month	11.5%
In the past six months	16.3%
Within the past year	11.0%
More than one year ago	49.2%

If you extrapolate these figures to the general population, it means approximately 40% of all chiropractic patients have seen their doctor of chiropractic in the past six months; 51% have done so in the past year. According to the authors, these figures also tell us that "the overall probability of ever having seen a chiropractor at least once" is 22.7%. On the other hand, it means only 51% of chiropractic patients saw their chiropractor within the past year (last week, last month or within the past year). According to the authors, "This yields an estimate of approximately 12% of the adult U.S. population having visited a chiropractor within the past 12 months (51% times 22.7%)."

So, we are seeing approximately 12% of the U.S. population annually, with another 10% of the population having seen their DC more than a year ago. This means the average DC has almost as many former patients (patients you haven't seen in more than a year) as you do current patients - food for thought. One might expect that the former patients were not very satisfied with their chiropractic care, which would explain why they haven't seen their DC in the past year. Actually, this is not the case. Chiropractic gets high marks from both current and former patients:

% of people who have ever visited a chiropractor (n = 400)

Satisfaction with chiropractic care

Very satisfied	53.5%
Satisfied	29.5%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	7.3%
Dissatisfied	5.5%

Very dissatisfied

3.8%

These are very high marks for chiropractic care. As the author points out: "Of the 23% of the adult population who have ever visited a chiropractor, overall rates of satisfaction are once again found to be quite high (83% satisfied or better) and the number of dissatisfied is quite low (less than 10% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied). This is remarkable given the fact that much of the financial burden of the care is borne by patients, and the preponderance of care is for difficult, chronic problems of back and neck."

The study goes on to look at which components have a significant effect on patient satisfaction. Here are the three components considered significant: (1) "My chiropractor orders and interprets appropriate laboratory tests." (2) "My chiropractor is concerned about me as a person and my overall health." (3) "My chiropractor explains things to me so that I can understand my health problems and choices, so I know what treatment is supposed to be doing for me."

These three considerations most likely will determine whether your patients are satisfied with your care. Here are two more associated with patient satisfaction, but not considered significant: (1) "My chiropractor provides effective advice for routine problems and illnesses. (2) "Out-of-pocket costs paid for chiropractic care are not too excessive."

Having said that, here is a list of those factors that "were insignificant in contributing to overall satisfaction score:"

- excessively long waiting time in the office;
- can reach the chiropractor by phone whenever necessary;
- provides good advice about staying healthy and preventing illness;
- effective in diagnosing serious problems and recommending action;
- willing to refer to appropriate specialists when necessary; and
- provides care to others in my family.

What matters most to your patients is what matters most to all of us in our relationships. We want quality time during which our concerns are addressed by someone who cares about us and is capable of explaining all of the information about our situation. These are important points we should be mindful of as we look to serve the other 77.3% who have yet to experience chiropractic. It's our reputation and the testimony of our patients that will win them over.

Reference

1. Gaumer G. Factors associated with patient satisfaction with chiropractic care: survey and review of the literature. *J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2006;29:455-462.

DMP Jr.

DECEMBER 2006