

Chiropractic's Next Great Opportunity

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Can you imagine people all over the world flocking to receive a service that focuses on alignment of the spine, natural wellness and increasing the unimpeded flow of life force throughout the body? Furthermore, imagine health professionals of every background referring and supporting this approach. Well, it's happening right now. It's called yoga. A recent survey found that since 2003, the number of yoga practitioners in America has tripled to approximately 16 million and another nearly 18 million are thinking of starting a practice.¹

Which health professional is best suited to serve this exploding population? If you said the chiropractor, then we must ask ourselves two very important questions: What are we doing to appeal to this predominantly well-educated, self-selecting population? And once we have them in our office, what knowledge do we bring to the table that addresses their particular needs? I promise you, advice such as, "If you have a neck problem, don't do headstands," just won't fly.

Yoga is based upon solid biomechanical fundamentals, utilizing a set of sophisticated alignment principles at the foundation of its practice. These fundamental principles are not difficult to learn and are very user-friendly. They provide a perfect complement to most chiropractic techniques and protocols, not just for the yoga practitioner, but also for all our patients and their structural concerns. To serve the hearts, minds and bodies of this yoga demographic, we must understand these fundamentals and put them into practice, on and off our tables. To become the professional of choice for the yogi, no shortcut or marketing scheme will work adequately. It requires an authentic understanding and a skillful application of this knowledge, reflected in the way we practice.

Yoga teachers vary in their expertise and knowledge. Some have therapeutic skills that would humble many of us. For others, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, as the saying goes. As a result, a growing number of musculoskeletal injuries can be attributed to yoga practice. Some injuries are immediate and many are of a repetitive traumatic nature. Simply put, yoga, when practiced with alignment fundamentals, is therapeutic. Yoga practiced without alignment is dangerous and will result in injury. If we understand the difference, we can have a huge impact on our patients, having the ability to advise them on specific alignment concepts to follow that will support them in their practice of yoga as an endeavor that promotes health and healing.

A Practical Example

In performing a forward bend, what part of the spine does the most work? Did you say lumbar? Two biomechanical principles come into play. The first is that movement should be initiated from the least mobile joints. This helps to increase the range of motion where it is most limited and prevents habitually exploiting hypermobile areas. The second principle is that the deeper the curve, the less segmental mobility is available. A deeper curve sacrifices mobility in order to provide stability. Improperly, many yoga students will round their lumbar and thoracic spines and drop their shoulders forward to perform this pose. In this common scenario, the thoracic spine does little work to increase its range while the lumbar spine becomes overstretched and destabilized, placing stress on the iliolumbar ligaments. The collapse of the shoulders also causes

tension in the cervical spine. Therefore, in a forward bend, extension through the thoracic spine is the primary action that creates therapeutic benefit, as opposed to injury.

Who is better than the chiropractor to serve the health care needs of the yoga community and be its expert on spinal alignment and structural issues? Let's not miss another great opportunity for our profession to grow. It's a natural. Let's do it right.

Reference

1. "Yoga Journal Releases 2008 'Yoga in America' Market Study." *Yoga Journal*, Feb. 26, 2008. www.yogajournal.com.

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