

Communication 101: Please Explain Yourself!

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Twice this past week, I overheard conversations about chiropractic. As you can imagine, it is a topic my ears naturally pick up. In both cases, a patient was talking to a friend about their experience with a chiropractor. I listened to see if the friend would be persuaded to try chiropractic.

The first conversation involved a woman describing to my friend what the DC had done when she went for care. She complained her neck was pulled and twisted in ways that made her uncomfortable. She didn't seem to have any idea why it had been done; she just knew it didn't feel good and questioned why it was necessary.

It was apparent from what she shared that very little communication had taken place between the woman and her doctor. At no time did she inquire as to what was wrong with her or what the prognosis was. It is as if she had entered the office, reclined on the table and gotten adjusted without her DC providing any information to her.

Her story made the doctor appear uncaring, rough-handed and incompetent. The friend was bewildered and a little bit put off by what she heard.

The second conversation is one I have heard too many times before. The person talking to my friend felt she was being taken advantage of by her chiropractor. According to her, he just wanted her to keep coming back for endless visits even though the problem was (in her mind) "fixed." She didn't seem to be aware of any end point to her care and felt she needed to terminate care because the DC never would.

Sadly, this made the DC appear to be more interested in receiving money from additional visits than in the well-being of the patient. This time, my friend accepted the woman's comments without any argument or discussion.

This second accusation is one I have heard many times before. It is like the light-bulb joke I was told years ago:

Q: How many chiropractors does it take to change a light bulb?

A: One, but they have to come back three times a week for four weeks.

For decades, chiropractic has enjoyed a reputation of having the highest patient satisfaction of any health care profession. [Study after study](#) has confirmed that DCs have better relationships with their patients than general MDs or any specialty.¹⁻⁴

A [study](#) published in September 2014 compared "Spinal Manipulation, Home Exercise, and Medication for Acute and Subacute Neck Pain." The authors found that "individuals receiving SMT [spinal manipulation therapy delivered by doctors of chiropractic] or HEA [home exercise and advice delivered by exercise therapists] were more satisfied with the *information and general care* received than MED [medication prescribed by medical doctors] group participants. Spinal

manipulation therapy and HEA groups reported similar satisfaction with *information provided during treatment*; however, the SMT group was more satisfied with general care."⁵ (Emphasis added)

This most recent study confirms that not providing sufficient information during care has a direct impact on patient satisfaction. Sadly, as the two recent conversations I referenced earlier suggest, it only takes a few moments of missed or absent communication to tarnish our reputation.

[Another study](#) suggests it takes almost three positive comments to offset one negative comment.⁶ If this is the case, my two friends will need to hear three positive reports about chiropractic apiece just to level out the negative comments they heard last week.

Communication is key in every relationship. Our willingness to share our chiropractic philosophy as it applies to each person's health helps them understand the what and why of chiropractic. Without consistent information, we miss opportunities to educate our patients on what we do, why we do it and why it is so important to their health.

A patient should never wonder what you are doing to their body or why you are doing it. They should also never question why their next visit is important or fail to understand what the factors are that tell them when they are "fixed." Without consistent educational conversations, chiropractic becomes a commodity in the patient's mind.

The chiropractic profession still lacks the resources for a big-budget [advertising campaign](#). What we do have (and have had for decades) is millions of patients spreading the good word about the power of chiropractic. This is why patient referrals are the most effective method of gaining new patients.

One barometer of how well you are communicating with your patients is how many new-patient referrals you get each month. If you are consistently providing the information they need, you empower your patients to share their chiropractic experience with their friends and family. Referral is a natural expression of a patient who understands chiropractic and its benefits.

References

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