

Why More Patients Don't Come to Your Office

AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

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Every so often, something turns out to be much easier than anticipated. It's like ordering a piece of furniture or a child's toy that comes in 167 pieces. You think it will take hours to put together, relying on poorly written instructions and little tricks you'll only learn after your third try. But then it arrives in four easy-to-assemble sections that only take minutes (with simple tools) to assemble.

A new study in the *American Journal of Managed Care* suggests the long-standing debate over why more people don't see a doctor of chiropractic when they have musculoskeletal pain may not be so complicated, either.¹ (Please see related article beginning on the front page of this issue.) Everyone gets this type of pain at various points in their life, so why isn't chiropractic the first thing they think about?

The authors (none of them DCs) surveyed 6,068 managed care patients with chronic musculoskeletal pain (CMP) regarding their use of chiropractic and acupuncture. They discovered a significant number (47 percent) had used chiropractic care. Managed care patients who had never utilized chiropractic care were asked to provide the reason they had never done so.

Here's what they said:

- Cost: 17%
- Don't know reputable provider: 10%
- Discomfort with or fear of the procedure: 15%
- Safety concerns: 14%
- Don't think it will help: 23%
- Never considered: 31%

So there it is: Almost *one-third* of adults with chronic musculoskeletal pain have never considered chiropractic care. Imagine if a third of people who play tennis never thought about using a racket?

It's not unusual for you and me to assume everyone understands the value of chiropractic. But clearly, we are failing to reach a large percentage of the U.S. population with our message. If we could overcome the last two reasons listed by study participants ("Don't think it will help" and "Never considered," assuming they are mutually exclusive), we could reach more than half of those people with chronic musculoskeletal pain (an estimated 10 percent of the population) who have never tried chiropractic. If we effectively get our message out, people will see chiropractic as an option and know it is effective.

Your job is to consistently get information out to the people in your community about the benefits of chiropractic. Given the data above, your efforts to communicate the benefits of chiropractic care could yield substantial benefits. Approximately one in 10 suffers from chronic musculoskeletal pain. Of these, more than half don't understand chiropractic care is an effective, nondrug choice for their pain.

In addition, everyone suffers from acute musculoskeletal pain at different points in their life. Your

efforts to inform and educate will yield an ongoing return on your investment.

There are many ways you can market your practice using this information. A well-informed patient is your best source of referrals. Whenever you share with people in your community, you create positive opinions about chiropractic care.

Think of ways to reach out with outside activities, charity involvement, etc. Volunteer to be the team chiropractor at youth sporting events. Let your patients bring in their relatives for free annual check-ups. There are myriad ways to gain recognition and build trust.

More than half of chronic musculoskeletal pain patients don't know or understand the benefits of chiropractic. That percentage is probably much higher for the rest of the population. Your efforts to share the chiropractic story will usually land on fertile soil. You just have to be willing to plant some seeds.

Reference

1. Elder C, DeBar L, Ritenbaugh C, et al. Acupuncture and chiropractic care: utilization and electronic medical record capture. *Am J Managed Care*, 2015;21(7):e414-e421.
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