

Is My Back Crooked?

John Hanks, DC

I recently read about the dangers facing illegal immigrants attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexican border. Desert heat, lack of water, hunger and physical exhaustion were only a few of the natural obstacles. These barriers to criminal trespass have stimulated some sympathetic people to organize and actually go out to the deserts along the border and stash "relief packages" at popular rendezvous points. These packages contain water bottles, first-aid kits, and even some birth-control items to prevent any additional "born on this soil" citizens. The humanitarian effort is controversial, but after reading about it, I just couldn't get the image out of my head that somewhere along the Rio Grande, there is a lone chiropractor standing by a portable adjusting table, performing spinal screenings on illegal immigrants.

DCs who conduct spinal screenings seem to be everywhere. Health fairs, sporting symposiums, and individual disease awareness events seem to be logical arenas for screenings. Even setting up at the end of a roller coaster ride makes sense - but I do not see the correlation between a 5K "Race for the Cure," and a booth at the end of the race explaining an injured patient's rights under automobile personal injury insurance. It now seems that every hardware exposition, boat show, chili cook-off and Scottish heritage festival has some DC lolling about, holding a plastic spine and performing spinal screenings.

I feel the same way about participating in a spinal screening event that I do about mowing the lawn: I don't want to do it; the public interaction is very fatiguing; and I don't like answering the same questions over and over. That doesn't mean they're useless. I've seen well-run, professional and informative screenings. Nonetheless, they seem to be getting out of hand.

I decided to call a few DCs around the country who practice near events, festivals, etc., that would seem highly unlikely to be proper venues for postural screenings. You know... like a funeral, perhaps. My first call was going to be a "warm-up," concerning an event that really could use a chiropractor on-site: the Wife-Carrying Contest in Sunday River, Maine. I don't know how this thing started, but men race over an obstacle course with their wives riding on their backs. (This seems similar to the Bed Race in Leadville, Colo., where men race old beds fitted with rollers down the street, each with a scantily clad female on top. This is done in honor of the historic "ladies of the night," so pervasive in the Old West.) In any case, I couldn't find Sunday River on the map, and finally gave up.

I also did not have much luck talking to any DCs near Kenwood, Calif., where they have the World Pillow-Fighting Contest. This also seemed fair game for a robust spinal screening booth, particularly for neck injury screenings, but the first office I called answered the phone in Spanish, and two other offices were closed. So, the question remains: Are they screening up in Kenwood?

The third call was to an office in Opelousas, La., regarding the annual summer Cajun Joke-Telling Contest. I randomly picked an office from a list of DCs, but the doctor couldn't come to the phone. His receptionist (I'll call her "Judy") was quite helpful, though: "If that was a good place for a screening booth, we'd be doing it," she said, indicating that the office did its share of screenings. "But don't forget about bridal fairs," she added. "We've got a lot of new patients from those."

Then there is the Heritage Days Bluegrass Festival and Coon Hound Championships in Hearne, Texas, where last year's art symbol was a raccoon standing on a banjo. Hearne doesn't have a DC, so I called chiropractors in the communities of Bryan-College Station and Caldwell, which are close - at least in terms of how "close" is measured in Texas. The staff in these offices didn't seem to understand my quest for the most unlikely screening event, so I let it go.

I called a DC friend in Tulsa, Okla., about the Puckerama - a whistling contest. He had never heard of it, so he could not comment on the advisability of having a spinal screening for folks with sore cheeks and lips. The search for the most outrageous postural screening event seemed to be waning. I could have called doctors in the neighborhoods of the Hot Dog Eating Contest on Coney Island, New York, or at the Garlic Festival in Gilroy, Calif., but by that point, I had lost my drive.

If any of you have your favorite entry for "the most unlikely event for a postural screening," please e-mail at the address below. I'll be delighted to report back on the submissions.

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