

Bone Scanning Fits Well in Chiropractic Practice

OSTEOPOROSIS PREVENTION HAS BECOME A DAILY MISSION

Maximo Lopez Montañez is 72 years old, and he has osteoporosis. The good news is that even at this advanced age, there are steps he can take to enhance his bone density.

Maximo is the father of one of my patients. She brought him to my office for a "Bone Scan Open House." As a service to my patients and the community, I leased a new dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry bone measuring system for the one-day event. The results were so enthusiastic - 45 people signed up for bone scans - and the results were so telling for specific individuals that I immediately purchased the machine.

I now offer bone scans as a regular part of my practice. For me, it's a short jump from my regular practice of providing spinal adjustments to assessing the density of my patients' skeletal structure. As with all chiropractors, maintaining good health and preventing disease in patients is something I focus on every day. I became interested in osteoporosis because of the startling impact it has on all of us. In the U.S., 10 million individuals are estimated to have the disease, and 34 million more are estimated to have osteopenia. For a health care provider, the key point, of course, is that it's preventable.

The scanning equipment is an invaluable tool for identifying a patient's bone density. I can then work with the patient to effect change. Ideally, I can test a patient in his or her late 30s to establish a baseline measurement. Then, in subsequent years, the patient and I can compare the initial test with tests in succeeding years and assess how well dietary supplements, exercise and lifestyle changes are affecting the patient's bone strength. However, a person age 37 or older can learn quite a bit from the first scan - because the database provides a comparison to other individuals of identical age and gender.

I chose the newest technology for bone-density testing. The equipment is small, portable and 97 percent accurate - a significant increase in accuracy over other existing scanning devices. The patient simply places his or her arm in a recess in the scanner and holds a post at the end of the recess. This locks in the target area - the distal radius and ulna - that is representative of total-body bone mass. The machine's design ensures that the same area is measured every time. That translates to the high rate of accuracy and reliability. The equipment's X-ray densitometer automatically identifies the 8 mm distance between the ulna and radius, and assesses a 24 mm section from this point proximally. Every calibration, positioning, assessment and calculation is performed automatically, diminishing greatly any possibility of operator error.

The scan can be performed on a patient in my office in less than five minutes. No preparation is required - the patient can remain fully clothed. The equipment is about the size of a small carry-on suitcase and uses a desktop computer to display and print results. When the results are printed, I review them with the patient and we talk about possible changes in diet or lifestyle. I charge \$100 per scan, including the follow-up consultation. This is about half what local hospitals currently charge.

The addition of a bone-density measurement tool has greatly enhanced my practice and given me a broader role in my patients' health care. However, my main motivation in adding this tool is to practice the prevention of osteoporosis. The National Osteoporosis Foundation reports that about one in two women and one in four men over the age of 50 will suffer an osteoporosis-related fracture in their lifetime. As a chiropractor, it is more than obvious that I should take a proactive role in addressing this disease of the skeletal system. After all, osteoporosis is the most common metabolic/systemic disease in the U.S. It is asymptomatic and undiagnosed in 94 percent of cases and cannot be left up to the medical profession to address.

For Maximo Lopez Montañez, the diagnosis came late in life; yet, even for him, the information provided by this bone-density technology can be used to enhance and add comfort to his life. For my younger patients, I am providing one more service to enrich their lives.

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