

Chiropractic Research

Overview

CHIROPRACTIC (from Greek *chiro* and *praktikos* meaning “done by hand”) is an alternative health care profession whose purpose is to diagnose and treat mechanical disorders of the spine and its supporting structures (e.g. discs, muscles, and ligaments). It is based on the premise that a spinal joint dysfunction can interfere with the nervous system and result in many different conditions of diminished health, musculoskeletal pain, irregular biomechanics, and spinal degeneration.

Research studies have shown chiropractic treatment to be cost-effective, and successful at treating musculoskeletal and spinal joint problems. Below is an overview of some of the more prevalent research.



Research

The New Zealand Commission Report A

particularly significant study of chiropractic was conducted between 1978-1980 by the New Zealand Commission of Inquiry. In its 377-page report to the House of Representatives, the Commission called its study “probably the most comprehensive and detailed independent examination of chiropractic ever undertaken in any country.”

By the end of the inquiry, the commission reported itself “irresistibly and with complete unanimity drawn to the conclusion that modern chiropractic is a soundly-based and valuable branch of health care in a specialized area...” Conclusions of the Commission’s report, based on investigations in New Zealand, the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, stated:

- » Spinal manual therapy in the hands of a registered chiropractor is safe.

- » Spinal manual therapy can be effective in relieving musculo-skeletal symptoms such as back pain, and other symptoms known to respond to such therapy, such as migraine.
- » Chiropractors are the only health practitioners who are necessarily equipped by their education and training to carry out spinal manual therapy.
- » In the public interest and in the interests of patients, there must be no impediment to full professional cooperation between chiropractors and medical practitioners.

1985 University of Saskatchewan Study In

1985 the University of Saskatchewan conducted a study of 283 patients “who had not responded to previous conservative or operative treatment” and who were initially classified as totally disabled. The study revealed that “81% ... became symptom free or achieved a state of mild intermittent pain with no work restrictions” after daily spinal manipulations were administered.

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RAND Study on Low-Back Pain A four-phase study conducted in the early 1990s by RAND, one of America's most prestigious centers for research in public policy, science and technology, explored many indications of low-back pain. In the RAND studies, an expert panel of researchers, including medical doctors and doctors of chiropractic, found that:

- » chiropractors deliver a substantial amount of health care to the U.S. population.
- » spinal manipulations are of benefit to some patients with acute low-back pain.

1990 British Medical Journal Report A study conducted by T.W. Meade, a medical doctor, and reported in the June 2, 1990, British Medical Journal concluded after two years of patient monitoring, "for patients with low-back pain in whom manipulation is not contraindicated, chiropractic almost certainly confers worthwhile, long-term benefit in comparison with hospital outpatient management."

Patient Disability Comparison A 1992 article in the Journal of Family Practice reported a study by D.C. Cherkin, Ph.D., which compared patients of family physicians as significantly higher (mean 39.7) than for patients managed by chiropractors (mean 10.8). "A related editorial in the same issue referred to risks of complications from lumbar manipulation as being "very low."

Virginia Comparative Study A 1992 study conducted by L.G. Schiffrin, Ph.D., provided an economist assessment of mandated health insurance coverage for chiropractic treatment within the Commonwealth of Virginia. As reported by the College of William and Mary, and the Medical College of Virginia, the study indicated that chiropractic provides therapeutic benefits at economical costs. The report also recommended that chiropractic should be a widely available form of health care.

The Magna Report A major study to assess the most appropriate use of available health care resources was reported in 1993. This was an outcome study funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and conducted in hopes of sharing information about ways to reduce the incidence of work-related injuries, and to address cost-effective ways to rehabilitate disabled and injured workers. The Manga Report overwhelmingly supported the efficacy, safety, scientific validity, and cost-effectiveness of chiropractic for low-back pain.

"Evidence from Canada and other countries suggests potential savings of hundreds of millions annually," the Manga Report states. "The literature clearly and consistently shows that the major savings from chiropractic management come from fewer and lower costs of auxiliary services, fewer hospitalizations, and a highly significant reduction in chronic problems, as well as in levels and duration of disability."

U.S. Government Agency Report A 1994 study published by the U.S. Agency for Health Care Policy and Research (AHCPR) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services endorses spinal manipulation for acute low back pain in adults in its Clinical Practice Guideline #14. An independent multidisciplinary panel of private-sector clinicians and other experts convened and developed specific statements on appropriate health care of acute low back problems in adults. One statement cited, relief of discomfort (low back pain) can be accomplished most safely with spinal manipulation, and/or nonprescription medication.

The Meade Study: Chiropractic Offers Long-Term Benefits This study concluded, "For patients with low-back in whom manipulation is not contraindicated, chiropractic almost certainly confers worthwhile, long-term benefit in comparison to hospital outpatient management."

