Low back pain of mechanical origin: randomised comparison of chiropractic and hospital outpatient treatment

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Alternative Medicine
Meade et al.: the Vindication of Chiropractic?
David E. Thaler, William Osler House

Chiropractic has been vindicated. Or so it would seem. The flurry of press reports that followed the publication of an article in the British Medical Journal [1] was probably the greatest published advertisement the “profession” has ever had. Much less was said in the popular press two weeks later when four full pages of the B.M.J.’s correspondence revealed important flaws in the design, analysis and conclusions of the paper by Meade and his colleagues. These criticisms will be discussed below following a definition and brief history of chiropractic.

Chiropractic: defined, with history

“Chiropractic” literally means “done by hand” and refers to its primary therapeutic intervention, which involves the manipulation of the spine. Manipulation here refers to the “forceful, passive movement of a joint beyond its active limit of motion”, as defined by Dorland’s Illustrated Medical Dictionary.

Chiropractic has its roots in osteopathy, which was “discovered” by Andrew Taylor Still, an American lay healer in 1894 [2]. Osteopathy originally employed a simple explanation for the aetiology of many diseases, namely, that subluxations of the vertebrae affected nerves and arteries which emerged around them and so caused pathological symptoms. Treatment by spinal manipulation realigned the vertebrae and so removed the pathology.

In 1905, Daniel D. Palmer - a grocer, fishmonger, phrenologist and “animal magnetic healer” from Iowa - discovered that he, too, could cure many illnesses with spinal manipulation and so wrote a textbook called The Science, Art and Philosophy of Chiropractic. The deviation from osteopathy is subtle and is based on differences in technique rather than in philosophy.
OMSG article

- Target article – DE Thaler
- Response by Dr. TE Meade, DM, FRCP, Director, MRC Epidemiology and Medical Care Unit
- Response by MI Bennett, DC, Asst Secretary, British Chiropractic Association
Meade’s criticism

- Critique is from medical mainstream who feel “threatened”
- “Chiropractic morbidity” does not address manipulations done by MDs, PTs, DOs
Bennett’s criticism

- Chiropractors receive intensive training
- Criticism of chiropractic’s scientific foundation is a “red herring”
- Supportive research abounds (cites Government reports and court testimony)
- Risks are well known and low (~1-3/million)
- Doctors who manipulate are riskier than chiropractors
- Medical morbidity is higher
Bennett’s criticism

Cites The BMA Guide to Living with Risk

“...irresponsible journalism can be responsible for much suffering, and unwarranted fear of rare side effects can wash the baby out with the bathwater.”

Does not cite three sentences later:

“The risk of a drug should be balanced against its need (including the availability of alternatives) and the severity of the disease for which it is needed.”
“Doctors ... are required to explain that there have been rare cases of injury to a vertebral artery as a result of treatment. Such an injury has been known to cause stroke, sometimes with serious neurological injury. The chances of this happening are extremely remote, approximately 1 per 1 million treatments.”

“Appropriate tests will be performed on you to help identify if you may be susceptible to that kind of injury.”
“Bearing all of this in mind, I will leave you with one message for Chiropractic Awareness Week - if spinal manipulation were a drug with such serious adverse effects and so little demonstrable benefit, then it would almost certainly have been taken off the market.”

Questioned claims of efficacy for:
• Colic
• Sleeping problems
• Eating problems
• Prolonged crying
• Asthma
• Frequent ear infections
The last word

Chiropractic Technique May Pose Stroke Risk

Neurologists Warn Patients About Neck Rotation

http://www.thebostonchannel.com/health/2666217/detail.html

The neurologists NewsCenter 5 spoke to say most chiropractic care involves little to no risk, but if you choose neck manipulation, ask about the risk of stroke.

"And if the chiropractor says, 'No, there's not,' I tell my patients to leave the chiropractor's office because they're lying," Thaler said.

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ANY QUESTIONS?