

The Changing Face of Chiropractic Facts and Myths of Chiropractic Care

What does a paradigm shift feel like? Interlace your fingers as you normally would. Now loosen your grip and shift your hand position one finger over. Does it feel different? Most would say that it does feel different but not dramatically different. This is what a paradigm shift should feel like, and this is what is happening throughout the chiropractic profession. There is a shift from the dogmatic approach to chiropractic to one of evidence based care. There is a negative stigma about the profession that is perpetuated not only by other health care professionals but also by the members of its own profession. The main culprit may be education. Most health care fields don't know what chiropractic is and what it can do. There is also a lack of information about how it is an excellent option for conservative care or as an adjunct to current treatment.

Many of the problems chiropractic care faces is how chiropractic is perceived. There are many myths and misconceptions about the profession that need to be explained more thoroughly. Let's look at some of these myths and try to dispel them.

1. Chiropractic is a procedure that takes pressure off nerves by moving bones.

First of all bones move along planes that are controlled by the facets and articular structure of the joints. Muscles are attached via tendons and ligaments to the bones controlling the action of movement. Bones do not "go out of place". Therefore bones don't pinch nerves. If this were to occur there would need to be articular disruption. Although the spinal nerve travels through the intervertebral foramen, it is rare for a bone-on-nerve subluxation to occur. There has to be significant facet hypertrophy or disc collapse, which is not a common encounter in clinical practice; perhaps 1 percent of the population with back pain suffers from this problem. The other consideration is when a nerve is compressed or entrapped in the periphery this leads to conduction block (parasthesia, numbness, tingling), not pain. What does the adjustment do then? Spinal joints and the articular capsule are innervated by mechanoreceptors (motion/pressure detection) and nociceptors (injury/pain detection). Studies originally done in animals and then later confirmed in human studies have shown that 90% of the innervation to the joint capsules is nociceptive. This means that the joints are being monitored heavily for injury. Mechanoreceptive input (the adjustment) will inhibit nociception pre and post synaptically as well via descending inhibition. Restoring normal motion to the joint is goal of the adjustment. An increase in mechanoreception will decrease nociceptive activity and decrease pain. The adjustment will also restore proper motion and allow for nutrient flow and a decrease in inflammatory mediators. Finally the adjustment will create a window for muscular retraining, joint and core stabilization, and functional retraining.

2. Once you go to a chiropractor you will have to keep going back.

Chiropractic treatments are by nature conservative. Treatment plans should be formed based on the acute or chronic nature of the problem. The goal of chiropractic treatment is to not treat the symptom but to treat the underlying cause of the problem. Many problems are multi-factorial however. Treating the

cause takes looking at a person's diet, the muscular components, tissue or nerve injury, stress levels, biomechanical dysfunction, and ergonomic considerations. A person with low back pain may very well have faulty walking biomechanics putting undo stress on the knees or low back. Headaches may be caused by postural problems and poor nutrition leading to muscle imbalances. These primary pain generators will not be corrected without taking the underlying dysfunctions into account. These problems take time to correct but it doesn't take a lifetime. The sooner the person you are working with becomes active in their care the shorter the treatment time.

3. Chiropractic is a faith healing technique.

Chiropractic is real. There is research that supports everything chiropractic does. Most of which is done by MD's, PT's, and PhD's in many different fields. The problem starts when evidence based explanations are not given to patients. Some may find it easier to get their reason for treatment across to a patient by explaining that a nerve is pinched. It may be easier but it's not true and it builds walls. There is nothing to "believe" about chiropractic. It is an evidence-based physical medicine that takes the whole of a patient's problems into account to correct the underlying cause of dysfunction.

There is no doubt the chiropractic profession is changing. Much of the resistance comes from within the profession itself. For too many years the profession has been approached dogmatically because of the ridicule it has undergone. There is a shift within the profession that is turning the profession in a positive direction. This direction is one of pragmatic, evidence-based therapeutics that encourages the patient to become involved in their care. This approach to health-care is one that can be utilized by all health care fields. An integrated approach to patient care is the future of health care. There is a need for misconceptions and prejudices to be put aside so we can work with one another and not against. There is much more to chiropractic than one may know about. Talk to a local chiropractor and find out what he has studied. You may be surprised to find that you are not so different. Changing a paradigm is difficult; helping patients shouldn't be.