

THE CHIROPRACTIC PATIENT EXPERIENCE

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In last month's article "*An Introduction to the Chiropractic Profession*", we specifically focused on the origins of chiropractic, training and education of chiropractors, regulation of chiropractic, and the scope of chiropractic care. This article will focus on the chiropractic patient experience written specifically from the author's perspective of what patients experience at his private practice. Individual chiropractic experiences may vary in different chiropractic settings dependent on practitioner interests, experience, education, and training.



Chiropractors along with medical doctors, dentists, psychologists, and optometrists have the legislated right and obligation to communicate a diagnosis and to use the title doctor. Chiropractors assess disorders related to the entire musculoskeletal system (joints, muscles, tendons, nerves, and bones). They provide diagnosis, treatment and management of those disorders. Chiropractors are trained to manage spinal and non-spinal complaints. Common conditions effectively managed with chiropractic care include but are not limited to: back pain, neck pain, sciatica, disc herniations, pinched nerves, whiplash, postural strain, TMJ dysfunction, migraine and tension headaches, muscle spasm, repetitive strain/sprain injuries, shoulder complaints and rotator cuff injuries, golfers/tennis elbow, carpal tunnel syndrome, hip and knee conditions, shin splints, plantar fasciitis/heel spurs, achilles tendonitis, bursitis, osteoarthritis, sport, work and motor vehicle injuries.

Before any treatment is commenced on a prospective chiropractic patient, there are several steps that are taken to ensure your case is one that can be helped with chiropractic care. First, a thorough **Medical History** is taken which documents an individual's specific concern, duration, location, and severity of symptoms, and relieving and aggravating factors. Additional health information required by the doctor may include general health questions concerning past episodes and treatments of the complaint, past surgeries and illnesses, medication use, family history of illness, systems review, and general health status. Second, a **Physical Examination** is performed consisting of standard postural, palpatory, orthopedic, neurological, and range of motion testing to help determine the cause(s) of your problem. X-rays may also be ordered to help formulate a diagnosis in certain circumstances. Third, a **Diagnosis and Prognosis** is communicated to the patient to let them know if their complaint(s) can benefit from chiropractic care. If the complaint will not benefit from chiropractic care, a referral is made to the appropriate health discipline.

For all complaints that may benefit from chiropractic care, a proposed treatment plan is communicated to the patient, including type of treatment and duration. Factors taken into consideration when developing a treatment plan for a particular individual include age, sex, severity and duration of complaint, genetics, lifestyle and environmental factors, physical health and fitness, and any other co-conditions. In addition, factors relating to patient concerns and preferences are also taken into account, because patients always have a choice as to the type of care they wish to

receive. Any proposed treatment plan requires informed consent by the patient.



Chiropractors are trained to offer multi-modal physical therapy incorporating the use of different techniques and strategies to stimulate and enhance the healing process. To effectively address structural complaints, these techniques and strategies are commonly employed in combination with each other. **Chiropractic adjustments** and **mobilizations** are just one mode of therapy utilized by chiropractors (but not with every patient), which deliver a controlled force with precise direction, leverage, and speed to restore normal motion and function in joints. **Soft tissue therapy** is used to decrease muscle spasm, painful adhesions, and increase pain free ranges of motion in muscles and joints. **Electrotherapy** is an effective treatment technique that is commonly employed in many progressive rehabilitation centres. It involves the application of relaxing therapeutic electrical current or sound waves to the area of injury, inflammation, dysfunction, or pain. Common electrotherapy application modalities include Interferential Current, TENS, Combination Therapy, and Ultrasound. **Acupuncture** is also a helpful technique used for many painful conditions to decrease tissue inflammation and promote blood flow to assist in the healing process. **Rehabilitative exercise prescription** aims to improve balance, coordination, strength, flexibility, posture and overall function. Rehabilitation also aims to implement strategies to prevent future relapses. **Nutrition prescription** can also be helpful for those individuals who have nutritional habits that are a significant contributor to their structural pain and overall energy levels.

The delivery of chiropractic treatments can occur in any one of three phases. In the **Acute Care Phase**, treatment is geared toward relieving pain. Initial treatment usually works best when a patient is seen frequently for a short period of time, ranging anywhere from one to six weeks. The **Supportive Care Phase** is for patients who have reached maximum therapeutic benefit, and for whom periodic trials of therapeutic withdrawal have led to a deterioration and failure to sustain previous therapeutic gains. The **Maintenance and Preventative Care Phase** is voluntarily chosen by the patient and given at regular intervals. It is designed to maintain maximum health and promote optimal function. It may incorporate screening procedures designed to identify developing risk problems pertaining to the patient's structural or overall health status.

Chiropractic has evolved substantially since its origin over 100 years ago. Today, chiropractic care provides many options for prospective and current patients seeking effective and safe therapy for their musculoskeletal complaints. Additional chiropractic resources can be found at: (www.nhwc.ca), (www.chiropractic.on.ca), and (www.ccachiro.org).

This article is a basic summary for educational purposes only. It is not intended, and should not be considered, as a replacement for consultation, diagnosis or treatment by a duly licensed health practitioner.