

EDITORIAL

CHIROPRACTIC AND PUBLIC HEALTH: CURRENT STATE AND FUTURE VISION

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of primary chiropractic issues as they relate to public health. This collaborative summary documents the chiropractic profession's current involvement in public health, reflects on past barriers that may have prevented full participation within the public health movement, and summarizes the relationship of current chiropractic and public health topics. Topics discussed include how the chiropractic profession participates in preventive health services, health promotion, immunization, geriatrics, health care in a military environment, and interdisciplinary care. (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2008;31:397-410)

Key Indexing Terms: *Chiropractic; Public Health; Preventive Health Services; Health Promotion; Immunization; Geriatrics; Military Personnel; Delivery of Health Care, Integrated; Evidence-Based Medicine*

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The fundamental principles of chiropractic care focus on health and the body's innate ability to heal itself. Some say the focus of chiropractic healing includes several elements, such as physical, psychosocial, emotional, and/or spiritual components, and that such a holistic view of health may still be a viable model in scientific practice.¹ This holistic chiropractic paradigm nicely matches the World Health Organization's (WHO's) definition of health, which states that health is "[a] state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease." Interestingly, the chiropractic profession had embraced a similar definition of health focus long before the WHO adopted their definition in 1946.² Chiropractic's historical approach has focused on the patient's innate, homeostatic powers, and capacity to heal itself. As stated by DD Palmer, the founder of the chiropractic profession, "Functions performed in a normal manner and amount result in health. Diseases are conditions resulting from either an excess or deficiency of functioning."³ With such a strong foundation in principles of wellness and health, it is surprising that the chiropractic profession had not been more involved in the public health movement.

To better understand chiropractic's role in public health, it is important to evaluate what has been accomplished in the past several decades and discuss how chiropractic may more

Fig 1. Coauthor contributions: topics related to chiropractic and public health.

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effectively embrace public health. This collaborative summary documents chiropractic's current involvement in the public health movement, reflects on past barriers that may have prevented chiropractic participation in public health associations and campaigns, and summarizes the relationship of chiropractic and current public health topics.

METHODS

Members of the chiropractic profession who have been active in areas of public health were invited to contribute concise summaries of topics of interest as they relate to chiropractic in public health (Fig 1).

RESULTS

The following sections provide summaries of key areas that chiropractic has or may have the potential to contribute to public health.

Chiropractic Integration Into the Public Health Arena: Crossing the Crossroads

Cheryl Hawk.

"Chiropractic ...has not come to a consensus on the implications of integration into mainstream health care... (the profession) stands at the crossroads of mainstream and alternative medicine. Its future role will probably be determined by its commitment to interdisciplinary cooperation and science-based practice."⁴

Integration into the arena of public health is an appropriate means for the chiropractic profession to resolve its conflicts on identity without compromising its integrity or losing its burgeoning emphasis on evidence-based care.

The definition of chiropractic proposed by the Association of Chiropractic Colleges is "a health care discipline which emphasizes the inherent recuperative power of the body to heal itself without the use of drugs or surgery...(it) focuses on the relationship between structure (primarily the spine) and function (as coordinated by the nervous system) and how that relationship affects the preservation and restoration of health."⁵ This definition is completely compatible with the definition of *public health*: "a society's efforts to protect, promote and restore health."⁶

The starting point for effecting this mode of integration is to refocus the profession on prevention and health promotion. This is in keeping with current trends in the wider world of health care. The national blueprint for improving the health of Americans, Healthy People 2010, places tremendous weight on disease prevention and health promotion. This initiative lays out 28 focus areas and 467 measurable objectives to guide federal, state, and local agencies; private organizations and businesses; health care providers; and private citizens to improve the health of the nation.⁷ Health care providers are integrally involved in meeting more than 60% of these 467 objectives,⁸ and chiropractors have not only an opportunity but a responsibility to participate in this effort.

The chiropractic profession can use Healthy People 2010 as a ready-made roadmap for integration into the health care mainstream. Whether chiropractors consider themselves spine specialists, primary care physicians, or wellness practitioners, they must still be aware of and contribute to the national priorities to prevent disease and promote health. These priorities are conducive to a wellness practice model. However, if chiropractic adopts a wellness model, it is essential that it be consistent with mainstream concepts and practice of health promotion and prevention.^{9,10} Such a model has been proposed to include manual procedures to promote optimal function, screening for risk factors, and health behavior counseling.⁹

Chiropractors, chiropractic colleges, and chiropractic organizations need to be more familiar with the Healthy People 2010 objectives to identify the activities congruent with their expertise and interests. This will lead naturally to their integration into public health activities. These activities may occur on a national basis, such as through the American Public Health Association (APHA) or through collaborating with actions of the National Arthritis Foundation. Implementation may occur locally, through state or county health departments. These health departments are under Federal mandates to work toward Healthy People objectives, such as increasing physical activity or decreasing disability related to low back pain; both of which are highly relevant to chiropractic practice. Rather than functioning as the Lone Ranger of health care, it is time for the chiropractic profession to join other providers and agencies to contribute to national

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