

CHAPTER 2

Principles of Chiropractic Healthcare

- **Lesson Purpose**

To give the student a solid background in the principles of chiropractic healthcare, including educational background and scope of practice.

- **Lesson Objective**

Upon completion the student will:

- Learn the principles of chiropractic healthcare
- Understand the chiropractic approach to healthcare
- Learn the educational requirements for chiropractic physicians
- Learn the scope of practice for chiropractic physicians

“These are my principles. If you don’t like them, I have others.”

—Groucho Marx

What is Chiropractic?

Chiropractic is the nation's third largest primary health care profession, surpassed in numbers only by practitioners of medicine and dentistry. Because of its remarkable effectiveness and increasing public awareness for natural and non-surgical methods of treatment, chiropractic is one of health care's fastest growing professions.

Chiropractic is generally described as a natural, conservative, medicine free and non-invasive form of health care. The original chiropractic philosophy began with the principle that an individual's health is determined largely by the nervous system and that interference with this system impairs normal functions and lowers resistance to disease.

Doctors of chiropractic address various physiological and biomechanical aspects including structural, spinal, musculoskeletal, neurological, vascular, nutritional, emotional, somatic, and environmental relationships.

Chiropractic is a natural method of health care with the proven ability to relieve pain, increase vitality, and promote well-being. For over a century, doctors of chiropractic have successfully helped millions of individuals recover from multiple health problems, most being of a neuro-musculo-skeletal origin. As a result, chiropractic has earned its place as the largest drugless and non-surgical health care profession in the United States.

Chiropractic Treatment

What can patients expect on their first visit?

Initial visits typically begin with a consultation. The doctor will take a case history and ask about the patient's present condition.

Next, the doctor will perform an examination to evaluate the nature of the problem. This examination generally includes a series of physical tests, as well as a specialized chiropractic evaluation of spinal movement and posture.

If necessary, the doctor may recommend X-rays or diagnostic tests to obtain further information about the mechanics of the patient's spine and the details of his/her condition.

After completing the analysis, the doctor will explain the problem and map out an appropriate plan of action with the patient. If necessary, the patient may be referred to another health care specialist for further evaluation or treatment. Doctors of chiropractic work with a variety of health care professionals in the best interest of their patients.

The doctor will discuss the care plan with the patient, taking into consideration their health habits, stress, and activity levels.

Over the course of care, the doctor will monitor the patient's individual responses and may also recommend changes to his/her lifestyle, work environment, diet, and exercise patterns.

How does chiropractic correct spinal problems?

Following the consultation and examination, a program of care will be designed and customized for each patient's individual needs. This plan is centered on the chiropractic adjustment, a method of treatment unique to chiropractic. While there are many techniques for providing the adjustment, all involve restoring joint function and removing nerve interference by utilizing some type of corrective force. This often immediately begins a healing process and eases irritated tissues. As for specific spinal conditions, the adjustment restores proper motion to a vertebral level in order to ease joint pain and relieves improper mechanical loading and dysfunction.

Some patients may feel immediate improvement after an adjustment, while others will experience gradual, progressive relief of symptoms. As the adjustment restores motion to the joint segment and stretches ligaments and tendons, there may be an initial soreness or tenderness. On these occasions, the patient should be assured that this is normal and that they will soon be enjoying the benefits of chiropractic. The patient may also need to be reminded that better results are gained with strict compliance to the treatment plan prescribed by the doctor.

How much chiropractic care will a patient need?

The number of visits a patient makes to the chiropractor depends on the nature of his/her condition and personal goals. Many people use chiropractic as part of a preventive health care routine by scheduling chiropractic appointments on a regular basis to keep their bodies

functioning at their best. Others seek care and treatment for specific conditions with the primary goal of treatment being pain relief. It is important for all patients to discuss their objectives with their chiropractor in order to develop a treatment plan that works best for them.

Keep in mind, healing rates vary from person to person. Children tend to respond more quickly to treatment, whereas adults and seniors may respond more slowly. A good rule of thumb is that the longer the spine has not been working properly, the more extensive the care plan may be to achieve desired results.

How can consumers find the right doctor of chiropractic?

When selecting a health care provider, whether a primary care physician, a dentist, or a doctor of chiropractic, it is important for a patient to take the time to consult with a few different possibilities before settling on the one of his/her choice.

The patient should evaluate his/her needs and health care goals. It is helpful to talk with friends and family and find out whom they recommend. The patient should then speak to his/her prospective doctor of chiropractic. A healthy relationship can develop if both have the same goals in mind.

Chiropractic Approach to Healthcare

How does chiropractic work?

The human body possesses a natural ability to restore itself. This ability depends on a healthy nervous system. Life events such as automobile accidents, sports injuries, repetitive work, and home stress are just some of the factors that can overwhelm the body's ability to adapt. The joints of the spine "lock up" when these events occur, limiting the range of motion. Spinal joint restriction and/or misalignment, results in irritation and/or pressure at the spinal nerve, internal and adjacent joint structures. Chiropractic care can correct these structural distortions, known as subluxations, by restoring the body to its optimal form and function. Local symptoms of subluxation may include pain, tenderness, swelling, tingling, numbness, or spasm around the joints of the spine, back, and neck. Many times these sensations extend further into the shoulders and arms, around the rib cage, or into the hips and down the legs. Subluxations can even lead to headaches, stomach and digestive problems, and loss of overall health.

Impaired nerve coordination causes the whole body to suffer. Vital instructions flow between the brain and the body by way of spinal nerves. These instructions inform and direct the body when, where, and how it needs to heal itself. By irritating nerves, subluxations interfere with the essential brain/body exchange, thereby compromising the normal function of the body's organs and tissues. Chiropractic care clears the path for the body to maintain its own health.

Doctors of chiropractic are specially trained in the evaluation and treatment of spinal conditions, which is why an increasing number of back pain sufferers are turning to them for fast, effective, and reliable care. Similarly, more and more hospitals and private practices are now working closely with doctors of chiropractic in order to ensure the best quality of care for patients who suffer from spine-related injuries and dysfunction.

The benefits of chiropractic care have also been shown to extend beyond reduction of back and neck pain. In fact, chiropractic has proven itself useful in the reduction of headache pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, jaw pain, sciatica, and tingling in the arms and legs. The rewards of chiropractic care are numerous. People under chiropractic care report better health and well-being and many families have realized the benefits of chiropractic care for their children.

Who should see a doctor of chiropractic?

Spinal dysfunction and nerve interference can affect anyone, which is why people of all ages experience relief and improved health through chiropractic care. A qualified doctor of chiropractic will best determine the appropriateness of care for each individual.

No method of health care has proven itself to be more effective than chiropractic in helping those who suffer from back and neck pain. Doctors of chiropractic are the most highly qualified professionals in evaluating and caring for these, as well as many other health problems.

Is chiropractic safe?

YES. Its non-surgical, drug-free approach to health, places chiropractic among the safest of all health care practices. There is a singular lack of formal data that would justify concluding that chiropractic care is in any

way harmful or dangerous. Chiropractic care is non-invasive, therefore, the body's response to chiropractic care is far more predictable than its reactions to drug treatments or surgical procedures. Of the nearly one million adjustments given every day in this country, complications are exceedingly rare. Perhaps the best summary statement on the subject of safety was published in 1979 by the Government of New Zealand which established a special commission to study chiropractic. They found:

“The conspicuous lack of evidence that chiropractors cause harm or allow harm to occur through neglect of medical referral can be taken to mean only one thing: that chiropractors have on the whole an impressive safety record.”

Remember, chiropractic takes nothing out of the body and puts nothing in. As a result, chiropractors enjoy one of the lowest malpractice rates of all health care professionals.

Educational Background of a Chiropractic Physician

Like all primary health care providers, doctors of chiropractic undergo extensive education and training before becoming licensed professionals. Students begin by fulfilling undergraduate degree requirements, with a strong emphasis on the core sciences such as chemistry, anatomy, physiology, and physics.

The professional program leading to the doctor of chiropractic degree is very demanding. Chiropractic students continue their study of the sciences, including pathology and biochemistry, at a highly detailed level.

Their education expands into the advanced clinical sciences including orthopedics, neurology, examination procedures, differential diagnosis, and X-ray interpretation. During this entire process, aspiring doctors of chiropractic gain knowledge of the philosophy and practice of health care and chiropractic.

What is the Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE) ?

The Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE) and its Commission on Accreditation is an autonomous national organization recognized by the

Secretary of the United States Department of Education as the authority on the quality of training offered by chiropractic colleges.

In addition to establishing accreditation criteria for the education of chiropractic physicians, the CCE Coupling agent to ensure the quality of chiropractic education in the United States by stimulating educational excellence and informing the educational community and the public of the nature, quality and integrity of chiropractic education.

Comparative studies have been done to illustrate the extensive training that doctors of chiropractic receive relative to medical doctors. The September 1998 issue of *Alternative Therapies* carried a research paper titled, "A Comparative Study of Chiropractic and Medical Education." In this official research paper, some very significant statistics were brought to the attention of the American public, and to legislatures, for impending law inclusion for chiropractic.

When comparing three chiropractic colleges with three medical schools in California, Texas and Iowa, the total contact hours was 4,826 for chiropractic colleges compared to 4,667 hours for medical schools. In basic sciences, chiropractic schools had 1,400 hours; medical schools, 1,200. In clinical sciences, chiropractic had 3,406 hours; medical schools had 3,467.

FIGURE 2.A

A review of selected topics of the basic sciences showed the following breakdown:

- **Anatomy:** chiropractic, 570 hours;
medical, 368 hours
- **Biochemistry:** chiropractic, 150 hours;
medical, 120 hours
- **Microbiology:** chiropractic, 120 hours;
medical, 120 hours
- **Physiology:** chiropractic, 305 hours;
medical, 142 hours
- **Pathology:** chiropractic, 205 hours;
medical, 162 hours

Chiropractic physicians are required to complete a comprehensive course of study comparable to medical physicians, including additional areas of specific relevance such as chiropractic technique and philosophy, clinical nutrition, public health, and office procedure and jurisprudence.

Doctors of chiropractic refine their technical adjusting skills in technique classes. During clinical internships, student doctors perfect these skills. Finally, all doctors of chiropractic must pass the rigorous national board exams, state exams, and performance standards before entering the field.

The National Board of Chiropractic Examiners (NBCE), established in 1963, functions similarly to the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME). This organization established testing parameters and specific examinations to qualify the doctoral candidate for licensure.

Part I of the NBCE exam covers the basic sciences and may be taken after the first year of chiropractic college education, Part II covers clinical sciences and is administered when a student is in his/her senior year of chiropractic college. Part III is a written clinical competency examination that requires an examinee to have passed Part I and be within eight months of graduation (if taken while still in school). The optional NBCE physiotherapy examination may be taken following the completion of 120 hours of physiotherapy coursework. This exam is independent of Parts I, II, and III.

The physiotherapy examination was initiated in 1965 as a response to requests from representatives of several state boards. Since the subject was being taught in many of the chiropractic colleges and because the use of physiotherapy was widespread among practicing chiropractors, there was interest in evaluating competency in the subject. The physiotherapy examination is maintained as a separate test because a few chiropractic institutions have not incorporated physiotherapy in their curriculum and some states' scope on practice laws restrict the use of physiotherapy modalities by chiropractors.

An additional national examination was developed at the request of the Federation of Chiropractic Licensing Boards (FCLB). Part IV, the practical examination, (Objective Structured Clinical Examination) tests students' practical skills in three areas: X-ray interpretation and diagnosis, chiropractic technique, and case management.

All 50 states require passing NBCE Parts I and II for licensure; 48 states require NBCE Part III and the other 2 states accept Part III; 48 states require Part IV, one state accepts Part IV and one state licenses chiropractors without Part IV. The content and format of the state-administered examinations vary considerably. Approximately one in three states require one state-administered evaluation. This may involve written responses regarding state regulations and statutes, an interview, or practical examination covering diagnostic and management procedures. The remaining states require two to four additional examinations. These state-administered examinations may cover clinical sciences, diagnostic sciences, X-ray interpretation, and spinal manipulative techniques, as well as questions about state statutes.

By law, licensed chiropractors are entitled to use the titles “doctor of chiropractic,” “D.C.,” “chiropractor,” or “chiropractic physician.” The chiropractic physician is engaged in the treatment and prevention of disease as well as the promotion of public health and welfare.

Scope of Chiropractic Practice

Now that you understand the principles of chiropractic care, the educational background of doctors of chiropractic, as well as the varying licensing requirements, it is important to discuss the scope of chiropractic practice. As with licensing requirements, every state may develop its own scope of practice based on parameters set forth in state legislation, rules and regulations.

The Association of Chiropractic Colleges (ACC) brings together a wide range of perspectives on chiropractic and is uniquely positioned to help define the chiropractic role within healthcare. The ACC presidents have offered the following definitions as a guide to educate students on the competent practices of chiropractic.

Defining Chiropractic Scope

Since human function is neurologically integrated, doctors of chiropractic evaluate and facilitate biomechanical and neuro-biological function and integrity through the use of appropriate conservative diagnostic and chiropractic care procedures. Therefore, direct-access chiropractic care is integral to everyone’s health care regimen.

Defining Chiropractic Practice

Doctors of chiropractic, as primary contact health care providers, employ the education, knowledge, diagnostic skill, and clinical judgment necessary to determine appropriate chiropractic care and management. Chiropractors have access to diagnostic procedures and/or referral resources as required.

Doctors of chiropractic establish a doctor/patient relationship and utilize adjustive and other clinical procedures unique to the chiropractic discipline. They may also use other conservative patient care procedures, and, when appropriate, collaborate with and/or refer to other health care providers.

Chiropractors advise and educate patients and communities in structural and spinal hygiene and healthful living practices. Ultimately a chiropractor's right to practice is based on the statutes and administrative rules of the individual state. The statutes of each state describe the parameters of the chiropractic profession including scope of practice and the creation of the examining board. The rules utilized by the chiropractic examining board to enforce the day to day practice of chiropractic can be found in your state's administrative code or in the rules and regulations.

Most scopes of practice include (1) primary patient contact or care; (2) right and duty to perform a diagnosis; (3) right to use spinal manipulation and a range of other manual and physical therapeutics; and (4) restrictions on prescription drugs or surgery.

Chiropractic is licensed and regulated in every state. State statutes and regulations determine the scope of clinical procedures chiropractors may legally perform in their respective jurisdictions. Within these legal boundaries, individual practitioners may practice as they wish. Providing care for musculoskeletal conditions using manipulation as a primary intervention is within the legal scope of chiropractic practice in all 50 states. The legal right to use other procedures including modalities, myofascial work, acupuncture, and nutritional therapy varies from state to state.

According to Christensen and Morgan, the United States and state constitutions empower states to grant licensure and to regulate scope of practice. State regulatory agencies, established by the legislature of each state, man-

age the licensing process and disseminate information regarding scope of practice. In most states, the extent of the scope of practice will be influenced by laws enacted through legislation, policies, or guidelines issued by the regulatory agency responsible for licensing, and by court decisions.

All states currently exclude prescribing drugs and performing major surgery from chiropractic practice. Otherwise, differences in scope of practice vary considerably from state to state. These variations are categorized here as: (1) restrictive, (2) expansive, or (3) intermediate. States are considered *restrictive* in scope if they explicitly prohibit chiropractors from performing two or more of the following: venipuncture for diagnostic purposes, use of physiotherapy modalities, dispensing of vitamin supplements, or provision of nutritional advice to patients.

A state classified as having an *expansive* scope of practice allows three or more of the following practices: specialty diagnostic procedures, pelvic and rectal examinations, venipuncture for laboratory diagnosis, signing of birth and death certificates, and acupuncture using needles. The remaining states have practice statutes that fall somewhere in between the extremes of expansive or restrictive.

Why regulate healthcare professionals?

Regulation exists to protect the public's health, safety, and welfare. Government statute provides for a board (generally composed of volunteer, professional, and consumer members) to handle regulation for each licensed profession.

Board responsibilities may include:

- Investigate consumer complaints;
- Oversee the general application of health care laws;
- Help update and develop regulations which better define appropriate conduct by professionals and clarify what the consumer may expect;
- Continually review required credentials for doctors to practice safely, effectively, and ethically;
- Apply appropriate disciplinary action or retrain doctors who may have broken the public trust through violation of statute or regulation;
- Function in the global regulatory community to assist other professions or jurisdictions affected by chiropractic.

The governor usually appoints board members for regulated professions. An appointee's term may last three to six years, with reappointment permitted after a prescribed period of time.

Where are chiropractors licensed?

Doctors of chiropractic are licensed in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia and many U.S. territories. They are also regulated in many other countries throughout the world.

When a license is granted to a chiropractor, what does this mean to the public?

Through licensure, the board assures the public that the doctor has met certain credentialing criteria, and that he/she continues to abide by the laws and regulations of that state or province. The requirements to enter licensed chiropractic practice are defined by laws and regulations designed to protect the public's health, safety and welfare.

What credentials are required by U.S. jurisdictions?

In general, certain common criteria cross jurisdictional borders.

These include:

- **Pre-chiropractic education** – States may require a minimum of two years in an accredited undergraduate program, which includes prescribed science content (biology, zoology, general or inorganic chemistry, and related laboratories). An increasing number of U.S. states require a bachelor's degree of candidates for licensure. Most candidates enrolling in chiropractic college today have their bachelor's degrees, while some may achieve it through parallel programs offered by a chiropractic college.
- **Graduation from an accredited chiropractic college** – All chiropractic colleges in the United States are currently accredited by the Council on Chiropractic Education.
- **Rigorous examinations** – As stated earlier in the chapter, most boards rely on a four-part examination offered by the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners.

- **Background investigation** – Boards conduct a thorough investigation into the character and credentials history for each applicant for licensure.
- **Understanding of state law** – This is often called the jurisprudence portion of the board's assessment of the candidate. This is important because there are some differences among jurisdictions in the type of care a chiropractor may legally provide.

Other licenses incident to a chiropractor may be held to criteria in respect to his/her area of expertise. For example, if a CTA is licensed, he/she may be required to provide proof of a fundamental educational diploma, obtain educational hours and training, pass an examination, undergo a background investigation, as well as receive instruction in jurisprudence for his/her licensure.

What should the public expect from a licensed chiropractor?

While the core concept of practice is based on healing without drugs or surgery, the specific scope may vary according to the laws of a specific jurisdiction. However, patients may commonly expect:

- A thorough physical examination to determine conditions which may be appropriate for chiropractic care;
- Referral to another healthcare provider for conditions which are not appropriate for chiropractic care;
- Counsel on the type of care to be administered, and what results may be expected;
- Discussion with the doctor as the care continues, to evaluate both treatment effectiveness and projected duration;
- A clear understanding of financial arrangements;
- Appropriate, ethical care delivered in confidence, with respect for privacy and dignity.

What happens if a licensee violates these basic rights?

As part of the regulatory board's duties, they are responsible for disciplining any doctor who steps outside the laws and regulations. Licensees who violate state regulations are statistically a small fraction

of the total licensed population; however, all complaints are investigated thoroughly. If the complaint cannot be resolved satisfactorily through informal processes, formal hearings may be conducted to hear testimony, determine facts and severity of offense, and if necessary, take disciplinary actions against the licensee.

How do you know if a license has been disciplined?

The public may contact their state licensing board to determine the status of a doctor's license. Many state licensing boards provide on-line resources for license verification through their web sites. Also, the Federation of Chiropractic Licensing Boards maintains an online, international databank, known as CIN-BAD. This databank carries information on public actions by chiropractic regulatory agencies related to licenses of individual practitioners. It also lists doctors prohibited from receiving Medicare reimbursement due to federal sanctions imposed by U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Members of the public may use a query form to request a search of the database.