

CHIROPRACTIC NEUROLOGY RESEARCH BRIEF

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS BY MARK SARACINO, DC, DACAN

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Patient Satisfaction Survey Results

Introduction

More of your patients are using holistic and/or hands-on methods, primarily chiropractic care, for the treatment of musculoskeletal pain because they heard from satisfied patients. Chiropractic has been shown to be safe and effective for a variety of musculoskeletal conditions, including headaches, neck and low back pain (1-3). Patient satisfaction is an important outcome in healthcare. Regression analysis of patient interview surveys shows that perceived effectiveness of treatment is the most important factor for patients when determining their levels of satisfaction (4).

In this issue of Chiropractic Neurology Research Brief, I created a synopsis of studies that have measured the satisfaction of patients who have received chiropractic therapy, the reasons why they are satisfied with the care they received, and how these results compare to medical treatment to the same regions.

Healthcare practitioners from different specialties provide different types of treatment for low back pain. A *New England Journal of Medicine* study randomly selected 208 practitioners consisting of primary care, chiropractic physicians and orthopedic surgeons. 1,633 patients with acute low back pain were periodically contacted by telephone for up to six months to assess functional status, work status, use of healthcare services, and satisfaction with the care they received. At six months, the length of time to functional recovery, return to work, and complete recovery from low back pain among the chiropractic group was similar to the primary care and orthopedic groups, however the satisfaction was greatest among the patients who went to chiropractors (6).

Acute LBP Study

A population-based study of 4,438 North Carolina residents was performed to determine which type of practitioners were sought for sudden onset, severe low back pain with some patient experiencing sciatica. Four hundred eighty-five (7.6 percent) of the people interviewed suffered at least one episode of acute, severe low back pain in the previous year. 24 percent sought care from a medical doctor, 13 percent sought care from a chiropractor, 61 percent sought no care, and two percent sought care from practitioners other than DCs, MDs and/or DOs. This study found that, compared to people who sought care from medical doctors, patients who sought care from chiropractors were more likely to feel that the treatment was helpful (99 percent vs. 80 percent), more likely to be satisfied with the care (96 percent vs. 84 percent), and less likely to seek care from

another provider for the same type of pain if it occurred in the future (14 percent vs. 27 percent) (5).

Chronic LBP Study

A study of chronic, recurring low back pain patients was performed to compare the outcomes of low back pain treatment from chiropractic and family physicians. The treatment-of-choice by chiropractors was spinal manipulation and physical therapy modalities. I perform extensive soft tissue manipulative, exercise and stretching therapy in my rehabilitation facility with few spinal manipulations. Anti-inflammatory medication was the most frequently used treatment by medical physicians. The chiropractic group showed improvement in all outcomes: 31 percent improvement in pain severity, 27 percent improvement in functional disability, 36 percent improvement in sensory pain quality, and 57 percent in affective pain quality. The medical group showed minimal improvement (six percent) in pain severity and functional disability (one percent) and showed deterioration in the sensory (29 percent) and affective dimensions of pain quality (26 percent). The study concluded that patients with chronic low back pain treated by chiropractors show greater improvement and satisfaction at one month compared to patients treated by family physicians (7).

Another study analyzed patient evaluations of the care they received for low back pain. Three hundred fifty-nine patients between 18 and 64 years of age were treated by family physicians. Three hundred forty-eight patients between the ages of 18 and 64 were treated by chiropractors. This study found that patients treated by chiropractors were three times as likely as patients treated by family physicians to report that they were very satisfied with the care they received for low back pain (66 percent versus 22 percent, respectively). The study also found that chiropractic patients were more satisfied with the amount of information they were given, perceived that their provider was more concerned about them, and felt that their provider was more comfortable and confident dealing with their problem (8).

A recently published study in the *American Journal of Public Health* sought to determine differences in patient satisfaction between chiropractic and medical care. Six hundred seventy-two patients suffering from low back pain, with or without leg pain, were randomized into one of four groups: medical (general practitioner), medical plus physical therapy, chiropractic, or chiropractic plus therapeutic modalities. Satisfaction was scored between 10 and 50 (50 being most satisfied) at four weeks. Mean satisfaction scores were found to be higher for chiropractic patients than for medical patients (36.1 vs. 30.6, respectively). Chiropractic patients received more advice on self-care and approximately four times as many chiropractic patients indicated that they received a better explanation of treatment compared to the patients that received medical treatment (61 percent vs. 16 percent) (9).

There are other reasons why patients are satisfied with chiropractic care. A visit-specific questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 150 patients seen by chiropractic physicians. Various aspects of chiropractic care were given a rating of “excellent” by the

following percentage of respondents: length of time to get an appointment (84.9 percent); convenience of the office (57.7 percent); access to the office by telephone (77.3 percent); length of wait at the office (75.7 percent); time spent with the provider (74.3 percent); explanation of what was done during the visit (72.8 percent); technical skills of the chiropractor (83.3 percent); and the personal manner of the chiropractor (92.4 percent). The visit overall was rated excellent by 83.3 percent of respondents and 95.5 percent stated they would definitely recommend the provider to others (10).

My approach is to work closely with each primary doctor and patient, taking time to explain the diagnosis and prognosis for every procedure and ailment. I fax within 24 hours my report of findings to you, because you need to know promptly what I, the specialist, are doing to your patients. After a summary letter is faxed to you, every patient is required to return to your office for follow-up.

Summary

With eight out of 10 chiropractic patients are satisfied with the treatment they receive and nine out of 10 feel that the treatment they receive is effective (11), chiropractic care should be considered a viable treatment option for patients suffering from musculoskeletal disorders.

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