

29th June, 2009

The Adelaide Advertiser
Att: The Editor
Mr Melvin Mansell
GPO Box 339
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Letter to the Editor

Dear Mr Mansell,

I was disappointed to read a recent article in the Adelaide Advertiser ("*Our cash wasted on unproven medicine*" by Tory Shepherd p.3, 25.6.09), which supplied your readers with inaccurate information concerning chiropractic care and its inclusion under Medicare's Enhanced Primary Care Program [EPC]. The article is based on incorrect comments from science commentator, Professor Rob Morrison, who believes "Medicare [is] funding treatments from chiropractors....that "don't really pass muster".

It is surprising that the article – which mentions the need for 'proper scientific analysis' – does not justify any of its claims regarding 'unproven treatments' and 'wasted' taxpayer money with such scientific approach. Since the article failed to provide your readership with accurate information on chiropractic care and EPC, I would like to take this opportunity to reject the following incorrect statements in the article, so that your readership can make informed decisions regarding their healthcare:

According to Professor Morrison, "Medicare [is] funding treatments from chiropractors...that 'don't really pass muster". Further, in the article, Australian Medical Association (SA) President, Dr. Andrew Lavender said governments "placated" some alternative therapies and their clients by subsidising some therapies"

1. EPC Medicare Scheme referrals growth

Since its expansion in 2004, the Enhanced Primary Care Program (EPC) has provided GPs, other referrers and patients with an increased level of choice and access to chiropractic care. As outlined in a recent article in the *Journal of Complementary Medicine*¹, this increased level of access is "*reflected in the substantial growth in the number of chiropractic and osteopathy EPC items, at around 80% a year.*"

This increase outpaced other allied health professional and GP items. **It is vitally important to note that patients under the EPC must receive a referral from a general practitioner.** The fact that chiropractic EPC referrals are growing at a substantial rate demonstrates the healthy collaborative relationship

¹ Kron, J. (2008). EPC Update. *Journal of Complimentary Medicine*, July/August, 21-24. Canberra, Australia.

between chiropractors and GPs. Clearly, the increased number of GPs in Australia referring to chiropractors under EPC do not share the beliefs held by Professor Morrison and Dr Lavender.

2. High professional standards

According to the most recent National Health Survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, over 215,000 Australians visit a chiropractor each week². Today, chiropractic receives wide public acceptance and is considered a part of mainstream healthcare. Australian chiropractors are five-year university trained at government universities and are regulated by government established chiropractic registration boards in all states and territories. They are also required to adhere to strict standards of practice and life-long education to maintain their registration to practice as primary care health professionals in Australia.

Through their extensive five-year university training, chiropractors are uniquely positioned to help patients lead healthy lifestyles through drug free, preventative care. The developments in chiropractic education enable chiropractors to deliver the highest levels of care to patients. These courses are of similar length and depth as medical courses, and focus primarily on the spine, as well as promoting healthy lifestyles via better body function, rather than on drugs and surgery. Accordingly, chiropractic education involves a special emphasis on anatomy, physiology, pathology, neurology, orthopaedics, biomechanics, radiography, spinal adjusting techniques and related subjects.

3. Effectiveness supported by the literature

A strong body of literature exists supporting the effectiveness of chiropractic care, particularly for the treatment of lower back pain, neck pain and headaches. A brief look at some of the available evidence on chiropractic shows:

- For acute and chronic pain & patients with chronic low-back pain treated by chiropractors showed greater improvement and satisfaction at one month than patients treated by family physicians³.
- In comparison to other treatment alternatives, acute and chronic chiropractic patients experienced better outcomes in pain, functional disability, and patient satisfaction. Clinically important improvements in pain and disability were found for chronic patients⁴.
- Chiropractic is a safe and effective spine pain treatment. It reduces pain, decreases medication use, rapidly advances physical therapy, and requires very few passive forms of treatment, such as bed rest⁵.

4. Cost effective care

The notion that taxpayer money is being "wasted" ignores the literature supporting the cost-effectiveness of chiropractic care. A brief look at some of the available evidence shows:

- A 2001 study of Medicare cost data completed by the well-known Washington, DC-based firm Muse & Associates helps prove the cost-saving impact that chiropractic care has on the current federal Medicare program⁶.
- A 2004 study⁷ from the American Specialty Health Plans Inc. of San Diego, published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* - a bi-monthly professional medical journal published by the American Medical Association - compared four years of back pain claims from two groups: 700,000 health plan

² Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006). National Health Survey: Summary of Results: 2004-05: 4364.0.

³ Nyiendo, J., Haas, M., & Goodwin, P. (2000). Patient characteristics, practice activities, and one-month outcomes for chronic, recurrent low-back pain treated by chiropractors and family medicine physicians: A practice-based feasibility study. *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics*, 23(4), 239-245.

⁴ Haas, M., Sharma, R., & Stano, M. (2005). Cost-Effectiveness of Medical and Chiropractic Care for Acute and Chronic Low Back Pain. *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics*, 28(8), 555-563.

⁵ Time to recognize value of chiropractic care? Science and patient satisfaction surveys cite usefulness of spinal manipulation. (2003). *Orthopedics Today*, 23(2), 14-15.

⁶ Utilization, Cost, and Effects of Chiropractic Care on Medicare Program Costs." Muse and Associates. American Chiropractic Association 2001

⁷ Antonio, P., et al. (2004). Comparative Analysis of Individuals With and Without Chiropractic Coverage: Patient Characteristics, Utilization, and Costs. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 164, 1985-1992.

members with chiropractic care coverage and 1 million members with the same health plan without chiropractic care coverage. Compared with doctor-only health plans, the study found that: Chiropractic care cut the cost of treating back pain by 28%; reduced hospitalizations among back pain patients by 41%; reduced back surgeries by 32% and reduced the cost of medical imaging, such as X-rays or MRIs, by 37%.

In the interests of open scientific debate, and ensuring your readers are empowered to make informed decisions regarding their healthcare, I urge you to consider reviewing current, scientific information as you advise your readership. I hope that you will consider the Chiropractors' Association of Australia as a resource for future articles.

If you wish to discuss any of these issues further, or if you have any questions about the information I've provided, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zoe Love', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Zoe Love
President
Chiropractors' Association of Australia (South Australia)