

LETTERS

of the Chiropractic Academy

August 2023

S02E03

**Why is there so little research
that deals with chiropractic?**



Letters of the Chiropractic Academy

Too little? Not enough? Just right?

Issue #3 - Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Moving beyond research advice and into opinion

This issue marks a true change in the direction of LOTCA. Up until now, our topics have been focused on offering advice, tips and other suggestions about conducting research. In this issue, we have our first topic that asks for your opinion – Why is there so little chiropractic research? As you can see from the contributions in this issue, there is no shortage of views on this subject and certainly ones that will keep generating discussion within our ranks. Is there such a thing as chiropractic research or is there simply research about chiropractic or valued by chiropractors? The questions, and suggested answers here, are extremely interesting and thought-provoking. This discussion couldn't come

at a better time. As research in chiropractic has grown from a few interested individuals to a career choice for many, talking about “chiropractic” research, and even doing research on “chiropractic” research, is going to be critical as we move forward.

Hey, there's a paper...

And right on queue for this topic, Lyndon Amorin-Woods and team have published a paper that describes a gap between what clinicians want and what researchers do (PMID: 37422749). In this study, which surveyed 44% of Australian academics and 21.5% of clinicians in the Australian Chiropractic Research Network database, “Comments from both groups illustrate the strongly held views that characterize divergent factions of the



chiropractic?

chiropractic profession.” Specifically, the divide came down to the desire to better understand the role of chiropractic for MSK conditions and spinal pain versus expanding this focus to other topics such as non-MSK conditions. One can only wonder if this situation differs in other jurisdictions or if the results are similar elsewhere. Perhaps, this is a good start for performing research on “chiropractic research”.

Thank you Charlotte

As you might expect, it takes many people to bring you each issue of LOTCA. Not only those who contribute submissions, but those who help guide the process and volunteer their time in countless ways. One of the original founders of LOTCA, Charlotte Lebeouf-

Yde, is turning toward the exit ramp of her career and steering toward retirement - we wish her the best in her new phase of life. As one of the early researchers in the chiropractic profession, Charlotte led the way and inspired many to do the same. We will miss her candid, but always thoughtful views, not only at LOTCA, but in many other forums as well. Good luck Charlotte – we expect that you may even contribute a LOTCA submission every now and then!

Our next topic

Do we need mechanistic research in chiropractic?

MASTHEAD

How to submit a contribution

Letters of the Chiropractic Academy is a collection of scholarly letters that address a single, specific question posed on a somewhat quarterly basis.

Goals

To build community and visibility for researchers through frequent and public discussion of important topics related to research, evidence and chiropractic practice.

Topic selection

Topics for discussion in upcoming issues can be nominated by anyone to a member of the steering committee who will keep a running list. The topic for the current issue, and the deadline for submission of contributions, will be selected after discussion by the steering committee.

Funding

Letters of the Chiropractic Academy does not receive funding, does not accept financial donations or allow advertising.

Contributors to LOTCA must have:

1. A PhD
2. Published at least 5 peer-reviewed papers over the past 5 years
3. An active appointment at an academic institution.
4. **Eligible contributors may nominate an unqualified contributor in the same issue.

How to contribute?

Contributions about the current topic should be no longer than 500 words. The contribution can be submitted to LOTCA.net. Create an account, then supply your author information and submit your contribution. The website will ask for

1. Your ~ 500-word letter
2. A current headshot
3. A text list of 5 citations (not papers) from the last 5 years
4. A self-written conflict of interest statement (e.g. <https://www.biomedcentral.com/getpublished/writing-resources/competing-interests>)

Submission deadline

The submission email must be received by the stated submission deadline. If nominating a guest contributor, the qualified contributor must submit their own materials together with the materials of the proposed guest.

Distribution

Issues of **Letters of the Chiropractic Academy** will be assembled by the advisory committee and then circulated back to contributors who are free to forward the issue to their colleagues and beyond.

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Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Iben Axen DC, PhD

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A Challenge

I will, first of all, challenge the above statement: there is quite a lot of research on chiropractic! We know fairly well who our patients are (people with musculoskeletal pain), what we do to them (we treat most with manipulative therapy, but many also with different adjunct therapies), and what conditions we have an effect on (low back and neck pain, broadly speaking).

Still, there seems to be a divide between what chiropractors want researchers to do research about, and the studies that chiropractic researchers actually conduct.

I think the major reason for this mismatch is the lack of agreement within the profession on who we are and what we do. Researchers consider the evidence: we treat people with musculoskeletal pain therefore it is relevant to study this population. We use a range of therapies thus it is relevant to study our “package of care”. As people seek care for pain and related functional issues, this is what we measure in studies.

I have been involved in conducting very chiropractic-oriented studies, like the studies in the Nordic Maintenance Care Program. We have studied the indications and content of Maintenance Care (a chiropractic method if there ever was one), the usage, the effect and cost-effectiveness (soon to be published). You would think that chiropractors would be happy with this line of study. Well, some are. I believe some even use the evidence, i.e. have stopped offering it to everybody.

But I often hear that we failed to include the “right” patients, that we did not study the relevant treatment modality or that we measured the “wrong” outcome. Therefore, this research is not perceived as relevant to some colleagues who think we are missing the “chiropractic” in these studies: we should be studying “everybody with a spine” (as opposed to people with back pain), different single techniques, and be measuring self-perceived symptoms of different disease outcomes.

As seen many times before, a group within the profession has a different view of what chiropractic is, how the treatment works and how it affects people and their disease processes, contrary to and regardless of the evidence. They will therefore never be happy with the (good quality) research that most of us do, and they will keep complaining that there is little chiropractic research.

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Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Alan Breen DC, PhD

Guest



This is a fascinating question

I think its largely because major funding bodies find chiropractic too narrow a topic to be often worthy of support and chiropractic researchers are also generally interested in a wider range of topics than chiropractic issues.

With regard to the gap between what clinicians want and what researchers do, I have generally been encouraged by chiropractic organisations to do research that shows what they do or think is right or effective and to publish it in high profile so they can point to it in their marketing efforts.

However, researchers usually have other motivations. In any case, a research career seems to appeal to few chiropractic graduates, partly because it is generally less well-

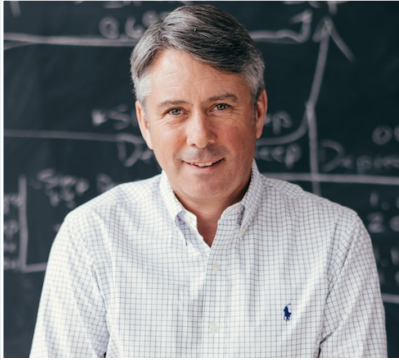
remunerated than a career as a practitioner.

Another factor is the extent to which chiropractic organisations are prepared to fund research in universities, which is the main venue for it in modern times. Research in chiropractic schools struggles because of lack of sufficient research culture, while there are relatively few research posts for chiropractors and few chiropractors with PhDs to fill them.

Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Pierre Côté DC, PhD

Ontario Tech University and Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research



Recruitment Failure and Success

There are several reasons why there is relatively little research that deals with chiropractic. One reason is that very few chiropractic schools are located within universities. This means that there is less opportunity for collaboration with other academic disciplines and less access to research funding and resources.

Another reason is the lack of integration of chiropractic within universal health systems. This means that there is little pressure for the profession to be accountable and to demonstrate the effectiveness of its interventions through rigorous research.

Additionally, there is little financial support for graduate studies in chiropractic. This makes it difficult for aspiring researchers to pursue advanced degrees and contribute to the development of the profession's research culture.

Furthermore, the research culture within

chiropractic is still relatively young. Historically, the research focus has been too narrow and centered around spinal manipulative therapy.

This has limited the scope of research and hindered the development of a broader research agenda. In the future, researchers with interest in chiropractic should focus on prevention and rehabilitation of patients with musculoskeletal disorders.

In summary, the limited amount of research in chiropractic can be attributed to a combination of factors, including the location of chiropractic schools, lack of integration within health systems, limited financial support for graduate studies, a young research culture, and a narrow historical focus on spinal manipulative therapy. These challenges must be addressed to strengthen the research capacity of the chiropractic profession and better meet the needs of chiropractic patients.

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Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Martin Descarreaux DC, PhD

Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières



Two different lenses

In the context of chiropractic research, the first point highlights the significance of university-based research conducted by chiropractors. While not directly addressing “chiropractic questions,” this research focuses on inquiries that are highly informative for clinicians treating musculoskeletal (MSK) disorders, including chiropractors. This distinction underscores the broader relevance of chiropractic care within the healthcare landscape. Such research delves into areas like the mechanisms of pain, the effectiveness of various manual therapies, and non-pharmacological approaches to managing MSK conditions. This research not only contributes to the professional knowledge base but also enhances the cultural authority of chiropractors by demonstrating their engagement with broader healthcare issues.

The second point emphasizes the challenges faced by many chiropractic programs, which are often not university-based and have limited research funding and resources. This

reality has historically led to a relative scarcity of chiropractic-specific research. However, it is crucial to recognize that this limitation doesn’t diminish the importance of chiropractic research as a discipline. Instead, it underscores the need for capacity building and resource allocation within chiropractic education and practice. Chiropractic research is indeed a valid and necessary field of study, focusing on chiropractic-specific interventions, patient outcomes, and the profession’s unique contributions to healthcare.

Considering these two perspectives, it is evident that chiropractic research has been influenced by both well-funded university-based initiatives and resource constraints in non-university settings. However, these challenges have prompted the profession to mature and recognize the importance of research in shaping its future. The increasing efforts and results in chiropractic research reflect the profession’s commitment to evidence-based practice, its cultural authority within the healthcare community, and its ongoing development as a valuable healthcare discipline. This evolution is essential in ensuring that chiropractic care continues to meet the needs of patients and maintains its relevance in the broader healthcare landscape.

Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Paul Dougherty DC, PhD

Guest



Definitions please

In order to best answer this question one must first define research and then define chiropractic. Research is defined as: “the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.” The definition of chiropractic according to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health is: “Chiropractic is a licensed health care profession that emphasizes the body’s ability to heal itself. Treatment typically involves manual therapy, often including spinal manipulation. Other forms of treatment, such as exercise and nutritional counselling, may be used as well.” While the definition of research is well established and has definitive parameters, the definition of Chiropractic is much more controversial. The issue is that if you ask 10 different chiropractors to define chiropractic, you are likely to get 12 answers. Some people equate chiropractic with spinal manipulation, however, to define chiropractic as spinal manipulation is equivalent to defining medicine as “prescribing drugs”. One could describe the aggregate behavior of a group of chiropractors’

performance in their practice every day, and that may give some insight into behaviors and also how patients respond. Coulter et al have performed a significant amount of this type of research however it is a relatively small body of literature. One could argue that the reason that “there is so little research that deals with chiropractic” is because we don’t really know what “chiropractic” is and therefore it makes it difficult to study in a systematic manner. A recent study out of Australia found that chiropractors are sharply divided on the priorities of future research, specifically what topics should be investigated and what should not.

I would like to pose a potential solution to these issues, stop calling it “chiropractic research”, because there is no such thing. Those of us who do research ask pertinent questions and try to develop study methodology that will answer that question. If those who want to do “chiropractic” research would stop being “chiro-centric” and just learn how to ask relevant questions and then develop ways to answer those questions then we would have more chiropractors who are just doing good research. In my experience it is not the “chiropractic” that opens doors, it is asking good questions. Let’s develop a new generation of chiropractors who care more about patient outcomes and how to improve them than they do about a specific profession or a specific treatment modality.

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Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Aron Downie BSc, MChiro, MPhil, PhD

Macquarie University



Lack of research in chiropractic

There are many ways to view this question:

1. “Chiropractic” as a therapy to improve clinical outcomes: a crude PUBMED search* returns ~330 clinical trials since I graduated as a chiropractor in 1995. If we include all study designs, there are greater than 5,000 hits. These counts are 10x less than searching for “physiotherapy”. So, there appears to be a lack of research that deals with chiropractic, compared to at least one cognate discipline.

* (“chiropract*”[Title/Abstract] AND (1995:2023[pdat]) AND (clinicaltrial[Filter])

2. Chiropractic is one of many primary health professions that intend to improve musculoskeletal health outcomes and decrease the burden of disease. Here, I would include all research that explores any part of evidence-informed chiropractic care (from lab-based studies, clinical assessment, diagnosis, intervention, service delivery etc.). From this perspective, there is not a lack of research that deals with chiropractic. However, it can

be difficult for clinicians and researchers to navigate this broader view of chiropractic due to the wide range in study quality, with many intervention studies underpowered or have other methodological issues. Also, the lack of operational definitions across disciplines (e.g. what IS spinal manipulative therapy?) limits interpretability and has been a known issue for over 10 years (e.g. CIRCLeSMT).

3. Musculoskeletal health research is underfunded in relation to disease burden. This is an issue for the whole field not just chiropractic. Also, publicly funded research that deals with MSK burden often has multidisciplinary authorship with a focus on the condition/intervention, not a profession.

4. “Chiropractic” as an alternative to medicine and not integrated with mainstream medicine. My opinion is there is too much research in this area, most of it of poor quality, but positioned as evidence to inform care despite efforts from the research community to educate the chiropractic profession otherwise.

In summary, we need more high-quality, publicly funded, multidisciplinary (where appropriate) research to advance chiropractic. To achieve this, we need to collaborate widely, avoid investing in low-quality research, and communicate with our professional bodies to advance best care through investing in high-quality research and researchers.

Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Simon French PhD, MPH, BAppSc(Chiro)

Macquarie University



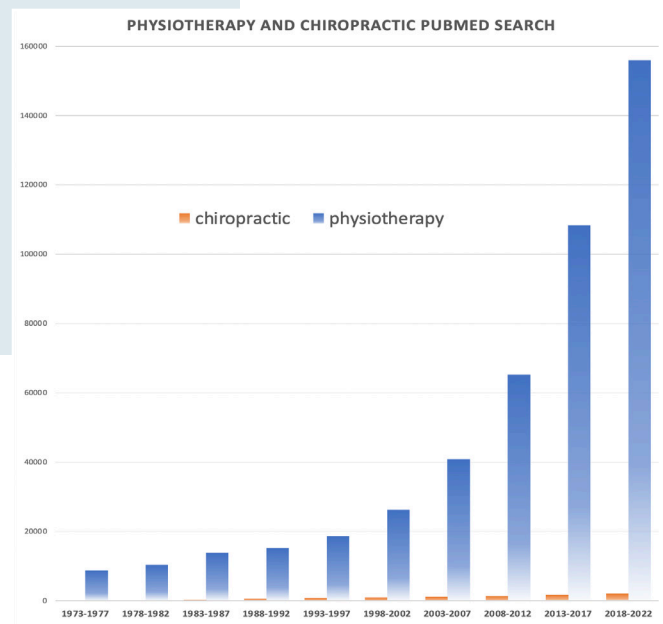
Is there really so little research that deals with chiropractic?

The premise of the question we address in this Issue of LOTCA assumes that there is little research that deals with chiropractic, but is this the case? Before we can examine why there is a problem, we need to establish whether there a problem actually exists.

One simple way to do this is to compare the amount of research that is relevant to the chiropractic profession, to research relevant to a similar profession. I did this by running two searches in PubMed covering the last 20 years (1973 to 2022) using the search terms “physiotherap* OR physical therapy” and “chiropract*”.The physiotherapy search revealed 413,958 results, and the chiropractic search revealed 9,578 results. The results of this quick and dirty PubMed search show that for every article that is potentially relevant to the chiropractic profession, there are 43 articles potentially relevant to physiotherapy. For a dramatic visual representation of this, collapsed into 5-year intervals, see the Figure. The blue bars show the number of articles in PubMed that are potentially relevant to the physiotherapy

profession, and the orange bars the number potentially relevant to the chiropractic profession. For each 5-year interval, there were at least 22 times more articles available that were relevant to the physiotherapy profession. Another clear observation is that the exponential growth of research relevant to the physiotherapy profession is not evident for the chiropractic profession.

Of course, there are a number of limitations with this approach. For example, many of the articles found in the physiotherapy search would be relevant to the chiropractic profession, and a more sophisticated analysis could look at the output of physiotherapy affiliated researchers compared to chiropractic affiliated researchers. However, overall I think it is fair to say that with this simple search, we have established that a problem exists. Now to possible reasons for why this problem exists.



Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Jan Hartvigsen DC, PhD

University of Southern Denmark



Research and education are linked

A casual search in PubMed for papers with the term “chiropractic” associated with them reveals that there has been an almost 3-fold increase between 2000 and 2022. While this is encouraging, the absolute number of papers is very low with only 481 papers published in 2022. By contrast, papers with the word “physiotherapy” associated with them have increased almost 6-fold during the same period to a staggering 15,146 papers published in 2022.

I can think of a number of reasons for this

- Funding: Only chiropractors have an interest in funding research related to chiropractic, and there are few and small funding bodies within chiropractic
- Research culture: Chiropractic does not have a mature research culture. Very few chiropractors are interested in research, and even fewer attend conferences where research is presented
- Poor research education: Most chiropractic educational programs do not have strong education in the importance of evidence and research. Students are not taught to read and appraise research so they can be critical consumers of research or how research can be applied to clinical practice
- There is little dialogue between clinicians and

researchers

- There are few career paths for chiropractic researchers within chiropractic
- There are few clinician-researchers, which is very common in fx. medicine
- There is no incentive for chiropractors to do research in chiropractic educational institutions or in the profession

Most chiropractors globally are educated in private educational institutions (private schools, colleges, or universities) that have no or very little focus on research. This is in my opinion the key reason for the low appreciation of research in chiropractic. Contrary to the private business model of education, publicly funded universities have a strong focus on research, they integrate research in their educational programs, fund research, provide platforms and support for applying for research grants outside of chiropractic, provide career paths for people who want to do research, and most importantly, advocate for the importance of research and how research should shape how healthcare is funded and delivered.

Moving forward, research and evidence is the most valuable currency for professional advancement. In my opinion, chiropractic will not achieve a stronger focus on research, a better appreciation of research, and a better research performance before we have a much stronger integration of chiropractic education into publicly funded universities. This should be the focus for chiropractic professional organizations everywhere. It is time to say goodbye to the private school model of education and focus on the integration of education and research.

Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Hazel Jenkins DC, PhD

Macquarie University



Is there too little chiropractic research?

I read the topic for this letter “Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?” and I must admit my first thought was ‘Is there too little chiropractic research?’ I’m not sure that I think there is.

I guess it depends upon what we mean by ‘chiropractic research’ - do we mean research performed by chiropractors? Or research that is performed in a chiropractic clinical setting? Or research that shows which chiropractic treatment works best (and what even is a chiropractic treatment - do we just mean spinal manipulation or do we include all the other techniques/modalities that chiropractors use every day)?

In my mind ‘chiropractic research’ means research that can be applied by chiropractors to inform clinical practice - and in this respect, I don’t necessarily believe there is too little research that deals with chiropractic.

In a recent review, I performed to map the evidence for 10 common treatments for low back pain (open access at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ejp.1974>). We found

that for these 10 treatments alone (including spinal manipulation) there were 220 published systematic reviews reporting on 1,290 primary studies. Spinal manipulation was the second most investigated treatment (after exercise), with 55 systematic reviews and 205 primary studies. This sounds like quite a lot of evidence and it is only from one area of the spine. Was all this research performed by chiropractors? - No. Was all this research performed in a chiropractic setting? - No. However, I would argue that all of this research is of potential relevance to chiropractors and may be able to inform chiropractic clinical practice.

So why, despite all of this available evidence, is there still a belief that there is little research that deals with chiropractic? Perhaps the real issue is that a lot of the available evidence includes small trials, low quality trials, and trials with contradictory findings. In short, research that does not end up making an impact in chiropractic clinical practice because of the uncertainties that still remain. Even when higher quality studies are performed and results are more certain, we know that only a fraction of this evidence is successfully implemented into clinical practice.

This is where I see the real problem - while there is quite a lot of research that may be of relevance for chiropractors, there is much less research that actually makes a difference in clinical practice. I would therefore ask that, as researchers, if we want to address this concern, we must make a concerted effort to prioritise high-quality research that is likely, directly or indirectly, to make an impact in clinical practice.

Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Greg Kawchuk BSC, DC, MSc, PhD

University of Alberta



Who cares?

The title of my contribution appears to be a snotty little jab. But note. It is not a comment punctuated with a period. It is punctuated with a question mark and therefore begs... who is doing the asking?

Is it a chiropractic patient? Is there enough research if you are a student in a chiropractic program? A clinician who wants their style of practice validated? An insurance agency? Politician? Leader of an association? As you can immediately see - there is no single answer.

Not only is the answer to this question based on who is asking the question, but also, what they need for “research”. As much as we need to have a broad discussion about what defines “chiropractic research” (yes, we should have that discussion), we should have a similar conversation about what defines “research” for different stakeholders. Not everyone needs an RCT.

We can't do all the research for everyone and all their needs with the few trained investigators we have, the small amount of funding available and a never-ending shortage of time.

These limited resources mean that we have some difficult choices to make. Said more directly, who should go to the top of the list? Who is the winner who gets “the research” and hopefully gets enough of it?

Should the winner be that clinician who if we'd only come visit and observe them, we'd understand how chiropractic really works? Or do we plow all of our collective resources into investigating everything about low back pain because this is by far the most common complaint of chiropractic patients?

The decisions made by researchers regarding the above extremes are as different as the people who need the research and in general, are formed by three factors: a) what interests the researcher (in the same way that clinicians have interests too), b) where the researcher can focus their resources to have the greatest impact (which likely evolves over years) and c) researchers knowing that clinicians have great ideas that historically have led to many important discoveries but, these can be risky n=1 investments.

How these three factors play out for researchers is not unlike a Hollywood film studio that has their main interest (action films), where they can focus their interests for the greatest impact (superheroes) yet constantly receive alt scripts about anything else in case there is a massive hit lurking out there (e.g. romcoms, documentaries) *Translation - clinicians, we do listen to you, but if we can't research your idea, don't demonize us for it. Realize that everyone we bump into has a “script” they think is the next blockbuster.*

So “Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?”. The answer, like most things in practice, science and life, is “it depends”.

Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Casper Nim MSc, PhD

University of Southern Denmark



Is there really so little chiropractic research?

The broader question is the perception surrounding the extent of research dealing with chiropractic. Within Biomedical research, which inherently encompasses chiropractic, more than two papers are published every minute (<https://www.nature.com/articles/nj7612-457a>). A portion of this body of work is undoubtedly linked to the domain of musculoskeletal (MSK) science.

Instead, we should scrutinize ourselves and consider why we do not believe this overflow of scientific literature is related to the field of chiropractic. I would argue that much research deals with chiropractic, as chiropractic primarily deals with MSK conditions. Still, regrettably, we may be overlooking these contributions. Drawing on empirical observations (including discussions with colleagues), this phenomenon seems to stem from two primary factors:

Perceived Uniqueness of Chiropractic: A

prevailing belief still exists in some factions that chiropractic holds a distinct status and is not exclusively confined to MSK matters. It is often linked with a vitalistic perspective that only those entrenched in the field can truly comprehend. Naturally, research investigating this viewpoint might be limited.

Emphasis on Spinal Manipulation (SMT): There appears to be a deep-rooted attachment to spinal manipulation within chiropractic. This inclination frequently translates to sentiments such as, “If a study doesn’t revolve around SMT, it isn’t truly chiropractic,” or “Why aren’t researchers just showing how effective chiropractic, namely SMT, is?” Even when studies related to SMT are published, they might be swiftly dismissed on grounds such as “This was conducted by physical therapists” or “This doesn’t align with my personal approach.”

We must acknowledge that while SMT is a valuable tool, it constitutes just one of the many resources within a competent clinician’s repertoire. As a direct extension, we must appreciate and understand that much of the published research is actually dealing with chiropractic.

Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Søren O'Neill Bsc(Chiro), MRehab, PhD

University of Southern Denmark



Must be the money

Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Well, comrades, brothers and sisters, I think you'll find it's a feature of the neoconservative capitalist order: The clinical outcomes of chiropractic may be in demand by the people, but they can not easily be monetized in a manner that allows for monopolized profit -- in other words, there is no big industry that stands to gain from investing in chiropractic research. The economy of the entire country of Denmark is currently growing, but it would have been stagnant had it not been for the recent success of a single pharmaceutical company (Novo Nordisk). Such is the scale of the pharma industry.

So the only thing left to drive chiropractic research is the individual motivation of chiropractic researchers and that comes in two flavors: internal and external motivation.

External motivation may revolve around things like money and social status -- such can

be had to a greater extent in other careers.

Internal motivation would be for instance genuine curiosity and just the sheer joy from doing research ... you know, applying for grants (and being rejected) and authoring peer-reviewed publications (and being rejected).

So chiropractic researchers, driven by internal motivation (which is the best kind) will find themselves continuously struggling to secure time and funding to pursue research ... not very motivating. In monetary terms, 'doing clinic' is rewarded immediately and directly -- 'improving clinic' through research is not: "Ain't got time to sharpen the axe -- too busy felling trees".

You might say that is not particular to chiropractic but also surgery, for instance - and you'd be right.

Hence, the amount and quality of research. So who's to pay for chiropractic research, research into chiropractic and chiropractor's research? The government, the chiropractors or the patients?

Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Stephen Perle DC

Guest



One problem is gender

We have a lot of evidence that women are disproportionately more likely to be chiropractic patients than men. And yet when I first became a chiropractic student at Texas Chiropractic College in the fall of 1979 less than 10% of my class were women. BJ's wife, Dr. Mabel Heath Palmer, a 1905 graduate of Palmer School of Chiropractic (founded only 8 years earlier), was the so-called "First Lady of Chiropractic," and despite her efforts to expand the number of females in the profession they have been a very small minority.

Medicine had this problem too and still does in the surgical specialties. This may be because surgery, like chiropractic, is a physically demanding job. I like to call our profession a blue-collar job but with white-collar brains. We know that women were not encouraged, mentored nor had role models to do anything that was physically demanding. There were roadblocks in place. In the USA it took the passage of Title IX, a federal civil rights law in 1972 to bring large numbers of females into sports. In 1987 I treated athletes at the Race Walking World Cup in NYC. I heard firsthand how angry the women were at the IAAF for restricting women to a 10k race when men competed at 20k and 50k.

It appears that the proportion of chiropractic students that are female has been increasing toward an average, across the world, of parity. Recently, the leaders of quite a few national chiropractic associations, the World Federation of Chiropractic, and the International Federation of Sports Chiropractic have been women.

The next great barrier is research. First, we all are aware of how women, minorities and children were systematically excluded as research subjects. Robert Mendelsohn in his 1982 book called it in the title: *Male Practice: How Doctors Manipulate Women*. But funders, like the US National Institutes of Health, having identified the problem now require that subjects be similar to the local population. We need women as subjects because their physiological, biomechanical, psychosocial etc. responses are not necessarily the same as men. *Vive la difference*.

So, what about female researchers? We need their perspective. They look at the world differently than males and that is inherently valuable. Right now, our profession's two major scientific journals JMPT and C&MT have women as editors-in-chief. Yet, a recent study by Aspinall et al has found, when looking at our profession's research conferences, that women are disproportionately less likely: to be on organizing committees; to be abstract peer reviewers, invited/keynote presenters, panelists, workshop leaders or present from the podiums or even have posters.

Do we lack women as researchers? Are they mansplained, ignored, or discriminated against? Are they not leading research teams? What's the cause of what Aspinall et al found? For our science to be generalizable we need a representative academy. How will we get there?

Why is there so little research that deals with chiropractic?

Peter Tuchin DC, PhD

Guest



Two things to ponder

In my opinion, there are two main reasons for the limited amount of chiropractic research- funding and not enough support for clinical research. It is a critical time for the chiropractic profession to create a plan to move research forward.

Chiropractic continues to be bashed in the media and social media/website/blogs, which are riddled with inaccuracies and blatant lies. There is strong evidence for SMT treatment of LBP, neck pain, headache and migraine, and this is where we cannot be challenged. But in other areas the evidence is weak and leaves us open for possible attack.

As recent events at RMIT University highlight, we need continuing, good-quality research. We must ALL support this by being involved in research, attending research presentations, and donating money to funding bodies to support the right balance of research.

As a chiropractic researcher and academic clinician, I often felt very under-supported by my profession. Many chiropractors spend \$1000's on personal development seminars or seminars with dubious evidence-based credentials. Yet, supporting high-quality seminars or

donating to granting bodies for chiropractic research gets almost nothing!

A \$ 1,000 donation (i.e. \$20 per week or \$3 per day) is probably less than 1% of most chiropractors' annual income, to protect your future and ensure your patients continue to receive chiropractic. What could \$1 million do for chiropractic research?

- Several large RCTs on chiropractic
- More PhD scholarships
- Research on new treatments and diagnostics
- Better public awareness and respect
- More acceptance in hospitals
- A healthier society

In my opinion, supporting large clinical trials are a very effective method of producing chiropractic research and raising the profile of the profession. This also means we need to be broad in our approach to research and collaborate with other areas in health care. It's not just about doing research we like. We also need to support the researchers themselves and acknowledge that they know the area that needs to be researched.

However, getting large clinical trials approved by university ethics committees is not easy, as politics is often involved. Ethics approval for my RCT on chiropractic treatment for migraines took over two years to get approval! Some medical professionals believe it is dangerous to conduct chiropractic research as manipulation can kill people.

Clinicians can also get involved in research, and the first step is to collaborate with an academic clinician to write a case report of your own case. This is a terrific first step in understanding the research and should lead to more chiropractic research!"

Letters of the Chiropractic Academy

Topical. Uncensored.
Rapid. Collegial.

Why Letters?

We love a good discussion...

One of the most stimulating activities in research is scientific debate. When colleagues get together and discuss matters of methodology, inference or clinical application, sparks fly. However, time and opportunity for scientific debate is limited, especially with researchers outside our immediate teams.

But how?

You might counter and say that we have many ways to communicate. What about Letters to the Editor (LTE). While a classic avenue for discussion, LTEs occur at a snail's pace and always with the approval of the editor. Not the best way to have an important conversation on a rapidly evolving topic. What about conferences? Well, the magic of hallway conversations evaporates quickly and

they seldom benefit more than a few. Panel discussions tend to be on topics set by others and are limited to just a few questions before the session goes overtime. And don't forget, you need the time and resources to attend in the first place (and wait a few years in the meantime).

Finally, a place for us.

What we lack is a place where we can discuss topics of our own choosing, to do so in a timely manner, without censorship, and to let the resulting dialogue be available to anyone. But we used to have that. Previously, scientists exchanged handwritten letters with each other. The resulting exchanges created deep relationships that then formed a research community centred on debate, discussion and decorum. Somewhere along the way, we've skipped this step.



A new take on a traditional concept

This initiative intends to take that step and resurrect, yet modernize, this scientific tradition by creating an international forum, open to researchers, where different points of view can be shared openly and responded to, in a scholarly way. No pressure. No censorship. Just the opportunity to engage in topics that are relevant to our community.

How it works

Each quarter, *Letters of the Chiropractic Academy* will post a discussion topic which will always, always, always, originate from inside our own community. Then, unlike any other forum, we will publish submissions from all eligible contributors. Long overdue, the result will be a mosaic of opinions, perspectives and viewpoints.

Because that is what a research community does. Create a place where its people have a voice. Not only a home, but an academy.

Here we go!

We hope you like the sound of this. We are sure you'll think it is fun, stimulating and a pleasure to take part in. Welcome to *Letters of the Chiropractic Academy*.

OUR NEXT TOPIC

Do we need mechanistic research in chiropractic?

Submission due

December 15, 2023

Topic ideas

Have an idea for a topic? Just send it to one of the members of the advisory panel (last page).

LETTERS

of the Chiropractic Academy

Advisory panel (alphabetical)

Greg Kawchuk
Iben Axen
Jan Hartvigsen
Martin Descarreaux
Pierre Côté
Silvano Mior
Simon French
Soren O'Neill

