

# Self-Care: A Comparative Case Study of Chiropractic Patients' Health Information Interests

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**ABSTRACT:** It has been suggested that clinicians should be looking at new ways of enhancing their patients' self-care. This case study explores the health promotion interests of chiropractic patients by ascertaining the types of information brochures patients would like to find in chiropractic clinics. *Research Methods:* Case studies of chiropractic patients in mainland Australia and Tasmania were compared. Purposive sampling of 10 mainland and 5 Tasmanian chiropractic clinics was undertaken. Convenience sampling of patients attending these clinics resulted in 140 mainland and 70 Tasmanian participants. Participants completed a semi-structured interview that sought to ascertain which health-related topics, if any, they perceived as relevant for development and distribution as health information brochures in chiropractic clinics. *Results:* The vast majority of patients favoured the development of a variety of health information brochures for chiropractic clinics. Although brochures on exercise-fitness and stress emerged as the most popular, there was support for general health information not immediately relevant to the musculoskeletal system. *Conclusions:* This study suggests patient support for a greater diversity in health information brochures than currently available in chiropractic clinics.

**INDEX TERMS:** MeSH:CHIROPRACTIC; HEALTH; PROMOTION;PAMPHLETS. OTHER: HEALTH INFORMATION.

Chiropr J Aust 2000; 30:45-7.

## INTRODUCTION

Self-care is emerging as an important health-promotion and disease-prevention option. In fact, it has been suggested that "self-care should be seen as central to all clinical interventions and clinicians should be looking for new ways to involve people in their own health care."<sup>1</sup> An initial, but essential, step whereby clinicians can foster their patients' self-care endeavours is by helping them acquire health information. Health information can then be used as a framework for developing efficacy expectancies and increasing personal competence in health care.

Efficacy expectations, the belief that one can successfully execute the necessary behaviour to achieve the desired outcome,<sup>2</sup> are fundamental to coping. Coping progresses from a belief that a particular approach will help, to the perception that one is capable of implementing the chosen approach and culminates in actually performing the exercise or mental task.<sup>3</sup> Coping behaviour has physiological and social consequences. Under experimental circumstances it has been found that coping behaviour leads to the release of endogenous compounds which have central nervous and behavioural repercussions.<sup>4</sup> Chiropractors can enhance patients' efficacy or coping expectations by providing them with active self-care measures. While already providing their patients with therapeutic exercises,<sup>5</sup> there is a potential for

chiropractors to extend their contribution to self-care in other areas. As a preliminary step towards identifying how chiropractors can promote patient self-care, this study seeks to identify areas of health information in which chiropractic patients are interested. It specifically seeks to ascertain whether chiropractic patients would be interested in having brochures available on these topics in chiropractic clinics.

## RESEARCH METHODS

A comparative case study was undertaken to ascertain the health information interests of mainland and Tasmanian chiropractic patients. Purposive sampling of chiropractors was undertaken including practitioners of diverse undergraduate backgrounds with practices located in city, suburban, coastal and country areas. Six Tasmania chiropractors and 10 mainland chiropractors practising in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria were invited to participate.

Convenience sampling of chiropractic patients attending for their chiropractic care on designated research days was undertaken. Data was collected by means of a semi-structured interview. Patients were asked to indicate whether they felt more health information brochures would be helpful in chiropractic clinics and presented with a list of topics from which they were invited to make a selection. Patients were invited to select from the following topics: sleep hygiene, nutritional hygiene, bowel health, dental hygiene, exercise and fitness, sexual hygiene, smoking, alcohol use, illicit drug use, vitamin supplements, mineral supplements, hormone replacement therapy (HRT), osteoporosis, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, weight control, cancer prevention, stress and pelvic floor dysfunction (female urinary incontinence).

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RESULTS

Ten practitioners from mainland Australia and five from Tasmania agreed to participate. One hundred and forty patients in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria completed the semi-structured interview. Seventy Tasmanians were included in the study. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of participants from mainland Australia were female, as were 57% of participants from Tasmania. Twenty-one percent (21%) of mainland patients described their condition as acute, 45% as chronic, and 34% were attending for maintenance care. Twenty-one percent (21%) of Tasmanian patients described their condition as acute, 38% as chronic, and 41% were attending for maintenance care. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of the mainland sample and 49% of the Tasmanian sample were non-smokers. Forty-seven percent (47%) of the mainland sample were teetotalers, and 44% consumed alcohol within safe limits. Thirty-six percent (36%) of the Tasmanian sample were teetotalers, and 61% drank within the limits recommended for cardiovascular health.

The majority of patients saw virtue in providing additional health information brochures in chiropractic clinics and selected one or more topics from the list provided. Six mainland Australians and four Tasmanians expressed no interest in having more brochures in chiropractic clinics. Eight mainland Australians and three Tasmanians expressed interest in chiropractic clinics displaying brochures on all the topics listed. Participants did not offer any suggestions for producing health brochures on topics not already listed. Exercise and fitness followed by brochures on stress emerged as the most popular topics for further information. Mainland Australian chiropractic patients in this study expressed a greater interest than their Tasmanian counterparts in obtaining information about sexual health (3:1), hormone replacement therapy (2.4:1), osteoporosis (2.3:1) and vitamin supplements (2:1). Other topics of greater interest to mainland participants were weight control, bowel health, mineral supplements and female urinary incontinence. The Tasmanian sample expressed a marginally greater interest in information about stress, exercise/fitness, dental hygiene and diabetes. More than half the participants in both groups favoured brochures providing advice on exercise and fitness, sleep (getting a good night's rest), nutrition and stress. More than half of the mainland patients participating also favoured information on weight control, coronary heart disease and osteoporosis. Over half of the Tasmanian sample also favoured information on cancer prevention.

Figures 1-4 compare the interest expressed by mainland Australians with that of Tasmanians in having brochures in chiropractic clinics. Figure 1 illustrates the interest shown by participants in obtaining more information about health-promoting habits. Figure 2 compares the interest of participants in obtaining more information about drug use. Female hormones refer to oestrogen and progesterone as used for hormone replacement therapy. Vitamin and mineral supplementation in doses taken above the recommended daily allowance can have pharmacological actions and are therefore categorised as drugs. The nutritional supplementation habits of the Tasmanian group were also canvassed. Forty percent (50%) took vitamin and 33% took mineral supplements. These results are, however, somewhat suspect, as a number

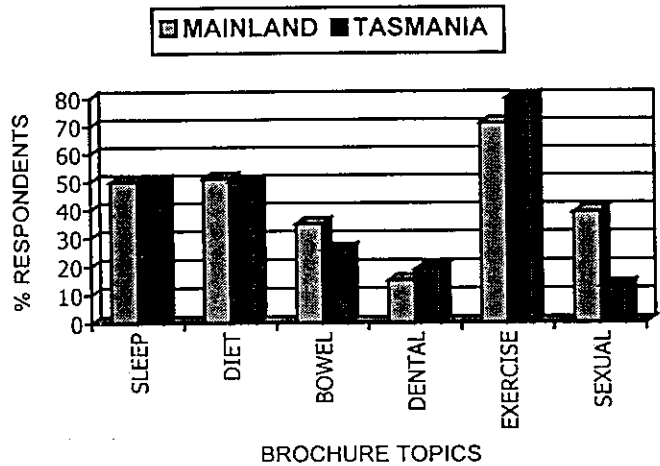


Figure 1. Brochure selection: Healthy habits.

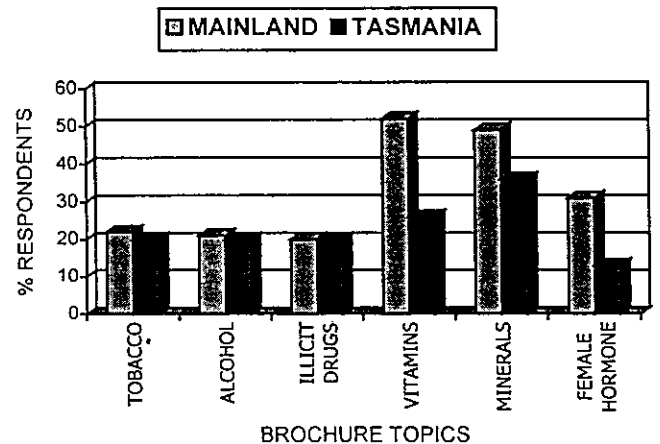


Figure 2. Brochure selection: Drug information.

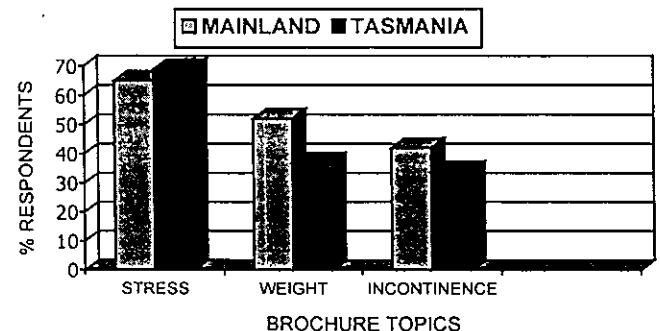


Figure 1. Brochure selection: Specific self care problem.

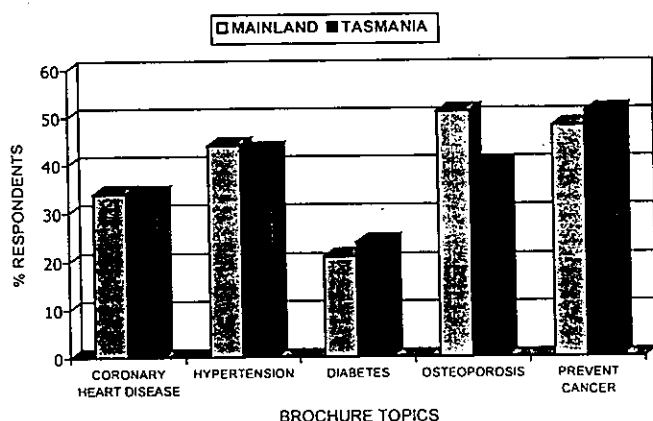


Figure 4. Brochure selection: Disease prevention.

of respondents failed to recognise that calcium and zinc are categorised as vitamins rather than minerals. It is worth noting that 17% of respondents who advocated brochures in these areas did not themselves take supplements, while 11% of those who did take vitamins and 16% of those who took minerals did not support placing brochures on these topics in chiropractic clinics. Less than one third of respondents taking nutritional supplements favoured having a brochure on one or both of these topics in chiropractic clinics. Figure 3 identifies participants' interest in having information about particular problems. Incontinence refers to urinary incontinence and was presented as brochures being developed on pelvic floor dysfunction to address female urinary incontinence. Figure 4 demonstrates the interest shown by participants in obtaining information about preventing certain diseases prevalent in Australia.

Male respondents largely selected topics of personal interest. In contrast, a number of women did not limit their selection to topics of personal relevance, choosing to include topics they perceived as useful for their family or important to the community. It was also noted that patients did not peruse chiropractic brochures already available in the clinics visited.

## DISCUSSION

Although chiropractic patients do not consider their chiropractors as their foremost source of health information,<sup>6</sup> there is overall patient support for greater diversity in the type of health information brochures available in chiropractic clinics. Brochures on exercise fitness and stress management are particularly favoured. This is consistent with previous studies that detected the interest of chiropractic patients in promoting their health in these areas.<sup>7,8</sup> The interest of chiropractic patients in having their chiropractors provide advice in these areas is not surprising in view of the links between stress and muscle tension, and exercise and the management of back pain. More unexpected is the finding that chiropractic patients would also like their chiropractic clinics to display information on strategies for preventing a number of chronic non-musculoskeletal conditions. This, along with the patient's desire for information on weight control, sleep, diet, and even sexual hygiene, does suggest that patients perceive that chiropractic care should offer

comprehensive health care information. This observation assumes a particularly interesting dimension when applied to patients' comments on drug information.

Over four in ten patients interviewed wanted brochure information on vitamin supplements, and a similar number wanted information on mineral supplements. The support for chiropractic clinics to supply brochures on hormone replacement therapy and illicit drug use is equally thought-provoking. Furthermore, although mainland Australians show greater interest in health promotion using drugs, whether this be by virtue of nutritional or hormonal supplementation, similar levels of interest were found in both groups regarding information on illicit drugs, alcohol and tobacco. Although chiropractic is itself a drugless form of health care, patients do seem to expect their chiropractors to provide information about the use of certain drugs.

The differences detected between the health information interests of mainland Australians and Tasmanians serves to emphasise the uniqueness of patient care. It is therefore suggested that individual chiropractors ascertain their clinic needs before investing in diverse health information brochures. This caution is particularly relevant as, despite patient enthusiasm for having a diversity of brochures available, no patients were observed to be reading brochures currently displayed. While this may have resulted from them having previously read the brochures in their chiropractic clinic, this should not necessarily be assumed.

## CONCLUSIONS

Chiropractic patients expressed interest in chiropractic clinics carrying a wider range of health information brochures. Although it may be prudent for each chiropractor to ascertain his/her own practice needs, exercise and fitness, sleep, nutrition, stress, weight control, coronary heart disease and osteoporosis are generally favoured topics of interest.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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