

# Chiropractic Patient-Centred Care: Suggestions from an International Case Study

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**ABSTRACT:** Patient-centred care, a notion consistent with chiropractic's philosophical constructs, is emerging as a dominant health care paradigm in the 21st century. This international case study sought to identify the health information needs and interests of chiropractic patients with a view to clarifying some variables deserving consideration when defining an appropriated chiropractic patient-centred practice model. *Method:* An exploratory study of five chiropractic practices, one in South Africa, two in the Republic of Ireland and two in the U.S.A., was undertaken. Convenience sampling resulted in participation by 50 South African, 75 Irish and 30 American patients. Participants were asked to select from a list of health information topics, to report on their lifestyle choices with respect to smoking, alcohol, exercise and certain dietary habits and to note their "top of the mind" responses to the word triggers "health information" and "chiropractic/chiropractor." Results were compared with a similar Australian study. *Results:* While each individual has unique interests and expectations, a number of chiropractic patients favour general health information also being available in their chiropractic clinics. Many of the behavioural choices of chiropractic patients are consistent with health promotion, nonetheless there are those who would benefit from personalised health information. Patients more readily perceive chiropractors as spinal experts than as a health information source. *Conclusions:* As the chiropractic profession strives to establish itself as an influential health partner offering patient-centred care, it is suggested that the character of chiropractic patient-centred care not be limited to spinal adjustments and exercise, but, based on the health information interests of chiropractic patients, be expanded to incorporate a more comprehensive definition of wellness.

INDEX TERMS: PATIENT-CENTRED CARE; PHILOSOPHY; HEALTH INFORMATION

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## INTRODUCTION

Philosophy influences practice. Beliefs influence what practitioners say and what they do. Philosophical constructs guide the profession and provide a useful framework with which to approach the patient. Coulter suggested that "contemporary chiropractic can be viewed, philosophically, as the offspring of five distinct philosophies: vitalism, holism, naturalism, conservatism (therapeutic), and critical rationalism."<sup>1</sup> While all of these constructs have impacted on chiropractic practice, it is perhaps vitalism that has the greatest impact. For "many chiropractors the concepts of innate and universal intelligence represents a *philosophia perennis*," i.e. an unchanging and unchangeable thread of truth unaffected by place and time.<sup>2</sup>

Chiropractic clinical practice, which seeks to optimise expression of this life force, is perceived to result in care that is "holistic, humanistic, naturalistic, personalised, conservative, intelligible, cooperative and egalitarian."<sup>3</sup> By seeking to restore homeostasis and creating an environment

in which the body can heal itself, the patient inevitably becomes the focus of chiropractic clinical practice. However, while in theory the clinical consequence of chiropractic's vitalistic approach would seem to be patient-centred, in practice innate intelligence is most often triggered by chiropractic adjustment of spinal subluxations. Nonetheless, an eight-member consensus panel characterised chiropractic's patient-centred paradigm as including self-healing; recognition of the patient as a unified whole; respect for the patient's values, beliefs and dignity; involvement of the patient as a partner in health promotion; and a natural and conservative approach to evidence-based care.<sup>4</sup> This paper seeks to explore how self-healing may be enhanced through the health promotion partnership envisaged between chiropractor and patient.

Chiropractors do expect their patients to contribute to their self-care. A study of 24 chiropractors and 124 of their patients concluded that these chiropractors expected their patients to voluntarily and actively participate in their health care.<sup>5</sup> Chiropractors furthermore seem to prefer a relational model of clinical practice in which practitioners provide guidance and patients assume a co-operative role.<sup>6</sup> The Emmanuels envisage four clinical practice variants which they designated, from most to least patient-centred, as informative, interpretative, deliberative and paternalistic.<sup>7</sup>

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