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Reducing the Personal Risk of Perceived Disease: The Chiropractic Patients' Self-care Endeavor

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ABSTRACT

Objective: It has been suggested that clinicians should be looking at new ways to enhance the self-care of their patients. Patient education is one strategy that primary providers may use. This study investigates the behavior of chiropractic patients to identify whether they are using widely published community health information messages to reduce their personally perceived risk of various diseases.

Methods: An exploratory study of chiropractic patients was undertaken to investigate the health-relevant behaviors of patients. Purposive sampling of 9 Australian chiropractic clinics was undertaken. Convenience sampling of patients attending these clinics resulted in the participation of 102 patients. All participants completed a questionnaire, and data were collected and collated into a series of case studies that described some behaviors of participants that might have influenced their risk of acquiring disease. The study was limited to diseases for which participants believed they were at risk.

Results: A substantial number of participants had undergone a screening procedure as recommended by health authorities. The 67 participants who believed they were at risk for one or more of the conditions listed were more likely to have complied. In addition, all participants made certain healthy lifestyle choices. However, implementation of those lifestyle choices that would reduce the personal risk of perceived diseases was sporadic.

Conclusion: The behavior of participants in this study suggests that many chiropractic patients would benefit from additional personalized health information messages. The use of information brochures in chiropractic clinics may not alone lead to a lifestyle change. (J Manipulative Physiol Ther 2001;24:378-84)

Key Indexing Terms: Chiropractic; Health Information; Patient Behavior

INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that "self-care is definitely the primary health resource in the health care system."[1] If self-care is indeed a major health resource, then "clinicians should be looking for new ways to involve people in their own health care."[2] And if "better health care will not depend on some new therapeutic standard, but on the level of willingness and competence to engage in self-care,"[3] then primary practitioners may be called on both to provide health information and to motivate behavior change. Although primary practitioners may be uniquely positioned to promote the health of their patients through self-care, health education is a time-consuming and demanding activity.

Before it is possible to maximize the cost-effectiveness of the health education effort of chiropractic practitioners, it is necessary to have some appreciation of how chiropractic patients use health information. This study used readily available community health information as its baseline to describe the lifestyle choices of chiropractic patients who believe they are at risk for certain prevalent diseases. Information leads to health promotion only when it results in behavior change. The ability or failure of chiropractic patients to voluntarily select and implement lifestyle options that reduce their personal risk of disease has implications for the type of health education strategies most likely to be effective in clinical practice.

METHODS

Because this study seeks to identify the health perceptions of patients from different backgrounds and to identify commonalities in the health-promoting and disease-preventing behaviors of a heterogeneous group of chiropractic patients, I decided to undertake purposive sampling. Purposive or maximum-variety sampling of practices was undertaken by selection of practitioners with diverse clinical styles practicing in clinics that were located in different socioeconomic and geographic locales. A convenience sample was taken of patients who attended the practice of 1 of 9 chiropractors

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