

**METHODS OF DETECTING CHIROPRACTIC SUBLUXATION:
THE OPINION OF VICTORIAN CHIROPRACTORS.**

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Summary

Chiropractors manipulate the human spine to relieve back pain and other symptoms. The decision by chiropractors to manipulate or not is based on the use of certain diagnostic procedures which allegedly detect manipulable lesions ("subluxations") in the spine. The objective of this research was to identify the preferred procedures used by chiropractors in Victoria to identify these manipulable lesions. In particular "Which methods are used most commonly, are regarded as reliable and are used most commonly in combination?". Another objective of the study was to identify the most popular term used to describe the manipulable lesion by the profession.

Given that the cost of chiropractic manipulative treatment in Australia is in the order of \$122 million per annum, the reliability and validity of the diagnostic methods which allegedly predict the necessity for manipulative treatment should be subjected to scientific scrutiny. This may assist in establishing a "gold standard" for diagnosing the spinal entity which chiropractors notionally manipulate. Such a gold standard may improve the cost-effectiveness of manipulative treatment by isolating only those patients who genuinely require manipulation.

A literature review of the sixteen methods selected for the survey showed that none had unequivocal reliability nor had any of the methods been shown to correlate with the manipulable lesion.

A questionnaire was constructed, piloted and sent to all 554 Registered chiropractors domiciled in Victoria. 460 (85%) returned the questionnaire.

The results show that there are eight preferred diagnostic methods used by chiropractors in Victoria to detect manipulable lesions of the spine. They are:

1. Visual posture analysis
2. Pain description of the patient
3. Plain static erect x-rays
4. Leg length discrepancy
5. Neurological tests
6. Motion palpation
7. Static palpation
8. Orthopaedic tests

The identification of this constellation of eight diagnostic methods in this study helps define the directions for future research into the reliability of "subluxation detection" and will allow a more pragmatic study of the reliability of chiropractic diagnostic methods.

The majority of the profession (67%) prefer the term subluxation to describe the manipulable lesion. However, there may be a trend away from the use of this term. Further research is required into the nomenclature used by chiropractors to describe the manipulable lesion.