

## **Integration, Integration, Integration – practicing chiropractic within a multidisciplinary healthcare system**

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If the words ‘*integrating chiropractic*’ aren’t on your radar of viable options of practicing chiropractic, consider this: DC’s are poised to serve as portal-of-entry health providers<sup>1</sup> within an integrative healthcare setting that includes mainstream medical physicians, as well as complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practitioners. With a collaborative patient-centered focus, the multidisciplinary practice model allows for each practitioner to provide their unique approach to healthcare, while also proficiently increasing patient care options – conveniently under the same roof. This design has chiropractors co-managing patients autonomously, yet side-by-side with medical personnel.

Current facilities and organizations successfully utilizing this model include primary care facilities,<sup>6-8</sup> professional and Olympic sports organizations, as well as those serving active and retired military personnel (Bethesda Naval Hospital, Department of Defense, and the Veteran’s Administration),<sup>2-3</sup> as well as underserved populations.<sup>9</sup> Several pilot studies have analyzed these models in regard to improving quality & effectiveness of health services, patient convenience, and administrative flow of operations. With an integrative healthcare model (including chiropractic), the negligible challenges include:

- The variety of practitioner’s gaining a full understanding of the legitimacy and effectiveness of chiropractic care;<sup>5</sup>
- The need for software to interconnect specialty care patient health forms and records with mainstream medical health records within the same Electronic Medical Record (EMR) system.<sup>5, 14</sup>

The recent passing of the Federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, its Reconciliation bill and HR 3590, suggests support for integrative healthcare and is a promissory note including *nondiscrimination provisions*. It states, “A group health

plan and a health insurance issuer offering group or individual health insurance coverage shall not discriminate with respect to participation under the plan or coverage against any health care provider who is acting within the scope of that provider's license or certification under applicable State law" (Section 2706).<sup>10</sup> Chiropractors are increasingly included within patient-centered, holistic and integrative community health teams, the healthcare workforce, and are included in the definition of health professionals. The bill guarantees the *need* for Doctors of Chiropractic will be assessed with consideration of workforce programs.<sup>10</sup> Thus it becomes the chiropractic profession's responsibility to develop methods of integrating chiropractic into mainstream healthcare.<sup>11</sup>

Under the new Act, two poignant trends are immerging as key aspects of American healthcare. First, healthcare is moving towards a team approach for providing care; and second, the focus is shifting away from 'sick-care' and towards wellness based care. MD's are already focusing on 'sick-care'; so who's the expert in wellness and preventative care? If chiropractors become the portal-of-entry doctor, in this role DC's are the best provider to promote wellness and have the ability to do so at all phases of patient care.

**The benefits of integrating chiropractic into a multidisciplinary healthcare model accommodate:**

- Patient convenience;
- Direct access of healthcare for patients;
- Harmonizing health services;
- Streamlining patient care flow;
- Cost efficiencies for practitioners and patients, with a measureable reduction in resource utilization;
- Lower healthcare costs;
- A team of healthcare professionals coordinating patient care, resulting in enhanced patient experience, less waiting time, more scheduling flexibility and better tracking of medical history and records;<sup>5</sup>

- Proactive health plans focusing on preventative care prior to the development of acute symptoms or chronic illness;
- Educating a variety of health professionals of the legitimacy and effectiveness of chiropractic.<sup>5</sup>

When multiple practitioners are working with patients and have full access to all medical records from all providers, redundancy of procedures is reduced. Gathering health information such as the vitals: height, weight, temperature and blood pressure can be performed succinctly, and all practitioners have access to those records.

The varieties of approaches within existing multidisciplinary facilities have an even greater variety of referral systems in place. The most important aspect of chiropractors entering into a multidisciplinary and integrative model is for Doctors of Chiropractic to be considered part of the primary care team and equal to any other physician and/or doctor. Chiropractors' joining the team as equals augments the ability to educate patients and practitioners alike – gaining respect from both. Chiropractic philosophy and techniques are shared with the masses, and become an integral part of an integrated system of healthcare. Essentially, the element of this model advancing chiropractic is that concepts of preventative and wellness care will become viewed as primary, rather than complementary.

With the ringing words of *integration, integration, integration* and the increased need for providing quality and effective health services, one can recognize how patient care management now demands *chiropractic, chiropractic, chiropractic*.

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