



## Doctors of Chiropractic Serving as Prevention and Wellness Providers

Prevention and wellness has been a cornerstone of chiropractic education and practice since the profession's inception more than one hundred years ago. Long before these subjects received serious attention in the health care community, chiropractic colleges offered students courses in nutrition and exercise, and consistently taught sensible, scientifically valid non-drug alternatives to regaining and maintaining good health.

There is no dispute that the leading causes of sickness and death in America are degenerative illnesses that can be mitigated by adopting a healthier lifestyle. The incidence of conditions such as heart disease, stroke, Type II diabetes, arthritis and certain cancers can be reduced by simply eliminating smoking, eating properly, getting regular exercise and maintaining the integrity of the neurologic control mechanisms that monitor and regulate virtually all body functions. These recommendations are the foundation of chiropractic practice.

Doctors of chiropractic (DCs) are fully licensed in all 50 states as portal-of-entry providers and routinely perform thorough examinations, take X-rays, perform or order laboratory tests, consult, refer if necessary, counsel and care for a wide and comprehensive variety of conditions--all with an eye toward restoring health and preventing future problems. Additionally, there are many other services routinely offered by DCs such as risk avoidance and prevention strategies, stress reduction counseling and healthful lifestyle coaching.

At this most critical time, when legislators are responding to a presidential mandate and taking a serious look at health care reform, the focus must be not only on the economics of our current system of crisis management and heroic intervention, but also on whether that system makes sense in respect to creating a healthier America as we move forward. Common sense dictates that doing the same thing in the same way, and expecting different results, dooms us to fail. How opportune then, as we as a country attempt to provide health insurance benefits to as many Americans as possible, that we strive to reduce the rampant costs associated with treating chronic illnesses by incorporating strategies that enhance overall health and wellness.

Over the years, there have been many campaigns designed to foster healthier lifestyles. However, few have yielded long-term successful outcomes. The chiropractic profession, like the United States Preventive Services Task Force, encourages wellness and prevention services that demonstrate consistent outcomes and provide measurable changes in the lifestyle of an individual and the overall health of a community. We believe incentives for participation should be created and reinforced at all levels of society, as well as in health professionals' offices, schools, and businesses. The prevention message must be repeated, and healthy actions must be rewarded.

No one questions the importance of medical physicians taking on this role and addressing wellness and prevention with their patients. However, given the shortage of primary care medical physicians, it's not reasonable to add the burden of wellness and prevention coaching to their duties and expect it to supersede their current surplus of disease care management. Who better to partner with them in promoting a healthy lifestyle and an intelligent approach to disease prevention and long-term wellness than the chiropractic profession? Our core philosophy has espoused these concepts in America for more than a century.

### **Talking Points:**

- The leading causes of disease and death in the United States are lifestyle related and preventable.
- ALL chiropractic colleges teach nutrition, exercise, and prevention and wellness strategies as part of their core curriculum.
- Doctors of chiropractic are fully licensed in all 50 states as primary contact, portal-of entry providers.
- Chiropractic services are essential and already mandated by law as core benefits for Medicare, Medicaid, active military personnel and veterans.
- Chiropractic physicians routinely perform comprehensive physical examinations, take X-rays, perform or order lab tests, and treat, counsel and refer, when appropriate, for the widest variety of health conditions.
- The United States Preventive Services Task Force encourages evidenced-based lifestyle changes for improving individual and community health. More than 80% of insurance benefits are paid in the final years of life on expensive interventions for conditions that could have been prevented.
- The work force gap resulting from the shortage of primary care physicians mandates that the 70,000 doctors of chiropractic in the United States be fully included as physicians under any new health care reform legislation and immediately pressed into service for the general public.