

CONFIDENTIAL FOR BCA MEMBERS ONLY

Information for BCA members regarding an article in the Daily Mail – April 8th 2008

A double page spread appeared in the edition of the Daily Mail April 8th 2008 on page 46 and 47 and titled 'Alternative Medicine The Verdict'.

The article was written by Simon Singh and Edzard Ernst and is a publicity prelude to a book they have written called 'Trick or Treatment? Alternative Medicine on Trial', which will be published later this month.

The article covers Alexander Technique, Aromatherapy, Flower Remedy, Chiropractic, Hypnotherapy, Magnet Therapy and Osteopathy.

The coverage of Chiropractic follows a familiar pattern for E Ernst. The treatment is oversimplified in explanation, with a heavy emphasis on words like thrust, strong and aggressive. There is tacit acknowledgement that chiropractic works for back pain, but then there is a long section about caution regarding neck manipulation. The article concludes by advising people not to have their neck manipulated and not to allow children to be treated.

CHIROPRACTIC THERAPY

WHAT IS IT? Chiropractors use spinal manipulation to realign the spine to restore mobility. Initial examination often includes X-ray images or MRI scans.

Spinal manipulation can be a fairly aggressive technique, which pushes the spinal joint slightly beyond what it is ordinarily capable of achieving, using a technique called high-velocity, low-amplitude thrust - exerting a relatively strong force in order to move the joint at speed, but the extent of the motion needs to be limited to prevent damage to the joint and its surrounding structures.

Although spinal manipulation is often associated with a cracking sound, this is not a result of the bones crunching or a sign that bones are being put back; the noise is caused by the release and popping of gas bubbles, generated when the fluid in the joint space is put under severe stress.

Some chiropractors claim to treat everything from digestive disorders to ear infections, others will treat only back problems.

DOES IT WORK? There is no evidence to suggest that spinal manipulation is effective for anything but back pain and even then conventional approaches (such as regular exercise and ibuprofen) are just as likely to be effective and are cheaper.

Neck manipulation has been linked to neurological complications such as strokes - in 1998, a 20-year-old Canadian woman died after neck manipulation caused a blood clot which led to stroke. We would strongly recommend physiotherapy exercises and osteopathy ahead of chiropractic therapy because they are at least effective and much safer.

If you do decide to visit a chiropractor despite our concerns and warnings, we very strongly recommend you confirm your chiropractor won't manipulate your neck. The dangers of chiropractic therapy to children are particularly worrying because a chiropractor would be manipulating an immature spine.

Daily Mail 2008 April 8th.

As we are aware that patients or potential patients of our members will be confronted with questions regarding this article, we have put together some comment and Q&As to assist you.

- **Please consider this information as strictly confidential and for your use only.**
- **Only use this if a patient asks about these specific issues; there is nothing to be gained from releasing any information not asked for.**
- **Do not duplicate these patient notes and hand out direct to the patient or the media; these are designed for you to use when in direct conversation with a patient.**

The BCA will be very carefully considering any questions or approaches we may receive from the press and will respond to them using specially briefed spokespeople. We would strongly advise our members **not to speak directly** to the press on any of the issues raised as a result of this coverage.

Please note that In the event of you receiving queries from the media, please refer these direct to BCA (0118 950 5950 – Anne Barlow or Sue Wakefield) or Publicity (0207 632 2400 – Julie Doyle or Sara Bailey).

The following points should assist you in answering questions that patients may ask with regard to the safety and effectiveness of chiropractic care. Potential questions are detailed along with the desired 'BCA response':

- **“The Daily Mail article seems to suggest chiropractic treatment is not that effective”**

Nothing could be further from the truth. The authors have had to concede that chiropractic treatment works for back pain as there is overwhelming evidence to support this. The authors also contest that pain killers and exercises can do the job just as well. What they fail to mention is that research has shown that this might be the case for some patients, but the amount of time it may take to recover is a lot longer and the chance of re-occurrence of the problem is higher. This means that chiropractic treatment works, gets results more quickly and helps prevent re-occurrence of the problem. Chiropractic is the third largest healthcare profession in the world and in the UK is recognised and regulated by the UK Government.

- **“The treatment is described as aggressive, can you explain?”**

It is important to say that the authors of the article clearly have no direct experience of chiropractic treatment, nor have they bothered to properly research the training and techniques. Chiropractic treatment can take many forms, depending on the nature of the problem, the particular patient's age and medical history and other factors. The training chiropractors receive is overseen by the government appointed regulator and the content of training is absolutely designed to ensure that an individual chiropractor understands exactly which treatment types are required in each individual patient scenario. Gentle technique, massage and exercise are just some of the techniques available in the chiropractor's 'toolkit'. It is a gross generalisation and a demonstration of lack of knowledge of chiropractic to characterise it the way it appeared in the article.

- **“The article talked about ‘claims’ of success with other problems”**

There is a large and undeniable body of evidence regarding the effectiveness of chiropractic treatment for musculoskeletal problems such as back pain. There is also growing evidence that chiropractic treatment can help many patients with other problems; persistent headaches for example. There is also anecdotal evidence and positive patient experience to show that other kinds of problems have been helped by chiropractic treatment. For many of these kinds of problems, the formal research is just beginning and a chiropractor would never propose their treatment as a substitute for other, ongoing treatments.

- **“Am I at risk of having a stroke if I have a chiropractic treatment?”**

What is important to understand is that any association between neck manipulation and stroke is **extremely** rare. Chiropractic is a very safe form of treatment.

Another important point to understand is that the treatments employed by chiropractors are statistically safer than many other conservative treatment options (such as ibuprofen and other pain killers with side effects such as gastric bleeding) for mechanical low back or neck pain conditions.

A research study in the UK, published just last year studied the neck manipulations received by nearly 20,000 chiropractic patients. **NO SERIOUS ADVERSE SIDE EFFECTS WERE IDENTIFIED AT ALL.** In another piece of research, published in February this year, stroke was found to be a very rare event and the risk associated with a visit to a chiropractor appeared to be **no different** from the risk of a stroke following a visit to a GP.

Other recent research shows that such an association with stroke may occur once in every 5.85 million adjustments. **To put this in context, a ‘significant risk’ for any therapeutic intervention (such as pain medication) is defined as 1 in 10,000.**

Additional info: Stroke is a natural occurring phenomenon, and evidence dictates that a number of key risk factors increase the likelihood of an individual suffering a stroke. Smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and family medical histories can all contribute; rarely does a stroke occur in isolation from these factors. Also, stroke symptoms can be similar to that of upper neck pains, stiffness or headaches, conditions for which patients may seek chiropractic treatment. BCA chiropractors are trained to recognise and diagnose these symptoms and advise appropriate mainstream medical care.

○ **“Can you tell if I am at risk from stroke?”**

As a BCA chiropractor I am trained to identify risk factors and **would not proceed with treatment** if there was any doubt as to the patient’s suitability. **Potential** risks may come to light during the taking of a case history, which may include: smoking, high cholesterol, contraceptive pill, Blood clotting problems/blood thinning meds, heart problems, trauma to the head etc and on physical examination e.g. high blood pressure, severe osteoarthritis of the neck, history of rheumatoid arthritis

○ **“Do you ever tell patients if they are at risk?”**

Yes, I would always discuss risks with patients and treatment will not proceed without informed consent.

○ **“Is it safe for my child to be treated by a chiropractor”**

It is a shame that the article so generalises the treatment provided by a chiropractor, that it makes such outrageous claims. My training in anatomy, physiology and diagnosis means that I absolutely understand the demands and needs of spines from the newborn baby to the very elderly patient. The techniques and treatments I might use on a 25 year old are not the same as those I would employ on a 5 year old. I see a lot of children as patients at this clinic and am able to offer help with a variety of problems with the back, joints and muscles. I examine every patient very thoroughly, understand their medical history and discuss my findings with them and their parents before undertaking any treatment.

- Chiropractic is a mature profession and numerous studies clearly demonstrate that chiropractic treatment, including manipulative and spinal adjustment, is both safe and effective.

- Thousands of patients are treated by me and my fellow chiropractors every day in the UK. Chiropractic is a healthcare profession that is growing purely because our patients see the results and GPs refer patients to us because they know we get results!

This article is to promote a book and a controversial one at that. Certainly, in the case of the comments about chiropractic, there is much evidence and research that has formed part of guidelines developed by the Royal Society of General Practitioners, NICE and other NHS/Government agencies, has been conveniently ignored. The statements about chiropractic treatment and technique demonstrate that there has clearly been no research into the actual education that chiropractors in the UK receive – in my case a four year full-time degree course that meets stringent educational standards set down by the government appointed regulator.