

Update 19

Subject: Why Patients Use Chiropractic

In 1998 John Astin, from Stanford University School of Medicine, published a paper (1) titled, 'Why Patients Use Alternative Medicine - Results of a National Study.'

The conclusion to Astin's paper stated,

"...the majority of alternative medicine users appear to be doing so not so much as result of being dissatisfied with conventional medicine but largely because they find these health care alternatives to be more congruent with their own values, beliefs, and philosophical orientations toward health and life."

If the conclusion to Astin's paper holds true for chiropractic patients we could be seeing one more reason why the future of the chiropractic profession might be best served by maintaining and further emphasising our status as a distinct health care profession with a unique science, art and philosophy.

Of further interest, whilst on the topic of why patients might use chiropractic, are the findings of a recently published survey (2) from the Canadian Memorial College of Chiropractic. The purpose of the study, published in the Journal of Gerontological Nursing, was to examine older adults' attitudes and motivations toward CAM use. Forty-two participants older than 65 completed a questionnaire and 10 of those same individuals participated in an interview session. **The results of the survey/interviews showed that although the most prevalent motivations for older patients using CAM was pain relief (54.8%), the second and third most prevalent motivations were to improve quality of life (45.2%), and maintain health and fitness (40.5%).**

I guess you could argue that the results of that survey don't specifically relate to chiropractic patients because it dealt with elderly CAM users in general, however that argument needs to be tempered by the fact that the most commonly used form of CAM by the participating elderly patients was chiropractic (61%).

In striving toward greater recognition we should be careful not too narrow the focus of each clinical encounter down to dealing with little more than pain and symptom resolution. Based on the results of Astin's study (1) patients clearly find appeal in the fact that their own values and beliefs resonate closely with our professions unique philosophical orientations toward health and life. Furthermore, based on Williamson's survey (2), beyond pain relief, chiropractic patients clearly value our care for improving quality of life, and maintaining health and fitness.

References:

1. Astin J. Why patients use alternative medicine: results of a national study. JAMA 1998; 279:1548-53.
2. Williamson AT, Fletcher PC, Dawson KA. Complementary and alternative medicine. Use in an older population. J Gerontol Nurs 2003;29:20-8.