

# The Relationship of Chiropractic Philosophy and Science

By Eric Russell

Throughout history there has been a raging debate over “what is science”. The boundary of what is accepted science and what is not is ever shifting and changing.

Many great academic thinkers have devoted their lives to the study of the philosophy of science. Philosophy of science concerns itself with the methods, assumptions and politics of science. This field of study has great implications in the chiropractic profession.

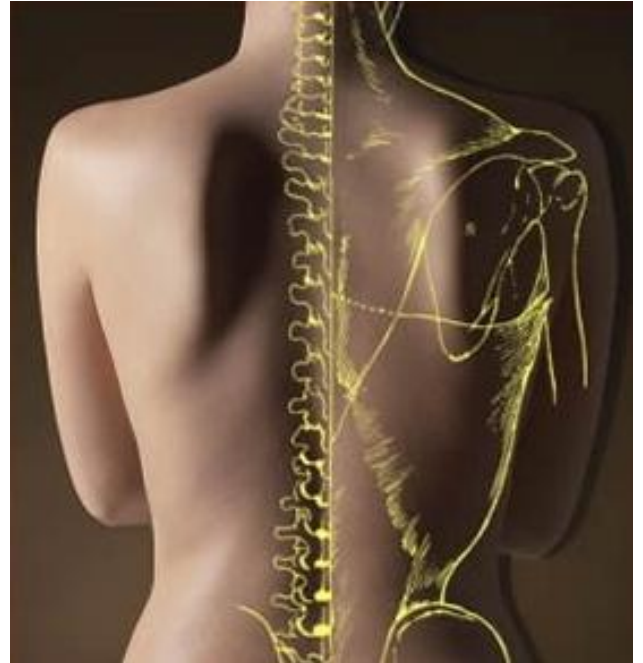
The main issue at hand is that chiropractic consists of material and immaterial components. Let me explain these terms further. Material things are items you can see, touch, measure etc.

For example, if someone gives you a box, you could measure the height and length in centimeters. You could also weigh the box in grams. Material things are easily measured by researchers and they help make up the constants in randomised control clinical trials.

Material items also go into the human body and its physiology as well. Things such as the speed of action potentials, muscle strength and range of motion studies come to mind. The role of research and especially randomized control clinical trials in chiropractic is critical for inter-professional dialog, acceptance into some governmental programs and certainty for the chiropractor.

But, in my opinion, this research needs to be spearheaded by chiropractors who fully understand the complexity of our profession.

Now, let’s take a moment to discuss the other component to the issue. Immaterial things are things you cannot see touch, measure or feel. They exist all around us and most of the major breakthroughs in science have come from developing new ways to measure things that could not be measured before. Immaterial items include such things as Innate Intelligence, the connection between doctor



and patient and love, just to name a few.

Several studies have shown that married men live longer than their never unmarried counterparts.<sup>1</sup> How does this work? We can measure the outcome such as increased life expectancy through statistics, but to fully comprehend how it works may escape us at this time. Does that mean it doesn’t exist?

Chiropractic has both material and immaterial components. So what should we do with this immaterial component to chiropractic since it cannot be easily measured through science?

Some want to throw it out of the profession completely because it cannot be measured through science. But even the ACC Paradigm states that the foundation of chiropractic includes philosophy, science, art, knowledge and clinical experience.<sup>2</sup>

Chiropractic is a science, a philosophy and art. Being involved in chiropractic academics for a while, I know that it is difficult for most chiropractic students to fully understand and appreciate the interaction between each.

Most chiropractors were taught that science, art and philosophy are actually a three legged stool. Each leg is equal and serves as a foundation for the profession. But early in most academic careers of students, they feel that you have to choose one exclusively over the others.

Some suggestions for improvement include a deeper understanding of epistemology, which deals with the nature and scope of knowledge. People within our profession will debate on the issue of what is accepted as truth or knowledge and how knowledge is acquired.

This debate can cause a rift or division in our profession or in inter-personal dialogue that leads to a breakdown in communication. But who is to say which method is the “one” true one?

Another suggestion is for a push of academic discourse around chiropractic philosophy. Here at the New Zealand College of Chiropractic, it is our goal to make sure students are ready to be successful in their practice and be involved in their profession. Certainly an understanding of the “why” of chiropractic is important. This should be pursued with great rigour and vigour.

Chiropractors should become “enlightened”. The enlightenment period of history was marked by the love of science, culture, art and reason.

Today’s chiropractor needs to be involved in science, the endless pursuit of the detection and correction of vertebral subluxation and technique excellence. This should be guided by philosophy to make sure there are no contradictions to theory and application.

And, most of all, they should love the lifelong pursuit of being the best chiropractor they can be.

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#### References:

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2. Association of Chiropractic Colleges Chiropractic Paradigm. [http://www.chirocolleges.org/paradigm\\_scope\\_practice.html](http://www.chirocolleges.org/paradigm_scope_practice.html) Website Accessed 2/2/11.