

globeandmail.com

News

Books

Careers

Mutual
Funds

Stocks

ROB
Magazine

ROBTV

Technology

Home | Business | National | International | Sports | Features | Arts | Forums | Subscribe

THE GLOBE AND MAIL
Tuesday, Nov. 30...You could win
\$100,000

7 Day Search

Go

[Tips](#) | [What can I search for?](#)

WIN LUNCH



FOR TWO!

Contents

- ▶ **Full News Index**
- ▶ **Report on Business**
- ▶ **National**
- ▶ **International**
- ▶ **Sports**
- ▶ **Globe Review**
(Arts & Leisure)
- ▶ **Features**
- ▶ **Comment**
- ▶ **Focus**
- ▶ **Books**
- ▶ **Classifieds**
- ▶ **new Automotive**
- ▶ **Births & Deaths**
- ▶ **Travel**
- ▶ **new Food & Dining**
- ▶ **Health**
- ▶ **new Environment**
- ▶ **Science**
- ▶ **new Education**
- ▶ **new Horoscopes**

ONLINE SHOPPING

Select Category 

www.epost.ca

Current Markets

Enter Canadian or U.S. stock
symbol(s) or market index:

Go

E-mail this article

Oh, your achey, breaky back

Despite an antagonistic medical establishment and some areas of controversy, scientific evidence is securely on the side of chiropractic for back and neck pain

CELIA MILNE

Special to The Globe and Mail
Tuesday, November 30, 1999

The whole thing got cracking in the United States, back in 1895, when expatriate Canadian Daniel David Palmer from Port Perry, Ont., started adjusting people's spines. He believed that subluxation -- or misalignment of the spine -- caused many diseases and could be fixed by applying force to certain parts of the vertebrae. So began the practice of chiropractic.

Medical doctors, of course, were not impressed, and neither were the police.

Mr. Palmer was arrested and thrown in jail in 1906 for practising medicine without a licence, setting the stage for a chiropractic history that reads like a lengthy witchhunt.

It wasn't until 1976 that chiropractors in the U.S. managed to put a chink in the armour of medical doctors. A group of chiropractors filed a lawsuit against the American Medical Association, claiming the medical community was maligning chiropractors to eliminate competition. The AMA was found guilty of conspiracy to create a medical monopoly.

Even so, antichiropractic sentiment still continues in some medical circles in both the U.S. and Canada. The antagonism these days is heightened by controversy over treating children, recent suggestions that neck adjustments cause stroke, outlandish claims by a few bad eggs in the business and so-far unsuccessful attempts to merge Canada's largest chiropractic school with Toronto's York University.

But Canadians in record numbers keep right on trooping to their chiropractors and little indicates that they shouldn't, as long as both parties keep in mind the limitations of chiropractic care.

Waterloo, Ont., physician Terry Polevoy, a pediatrician specializing in acne, runs an acerbic Web site called

Noteworthy

Sponsored by:

800.593.4111



Behind Closed Doors: The Struggle Over Homecare

More than three million Canadians toil daily caring for faltering spouses, aging parents, recuperating family members or disabled children. Read the four-part feature on homecare by award-winning Globe and Mail journalist André Picard.

Blind Choice: What fertility clinics don't say

In the unregulated business of baby-making, operators do not always reveal just how long the odds are against a couple becoming parents.

Discussion Forums

▶ **Chrétien's Ceasefire**
[Will Jean Chrétien's tactic to stop a Quebec referendum work?](#)

▶ **The Pope and the Past**
Pope Pius XII's role in the Holocaust has long been debated. [Should the Vatican archive be open to historians in order to uncover the truth?](#)

▶ **Lost in the Suburbs**
"That the suburbs, some of them opulent, are the incubators of tax revolt, is astounding..." [Join the discussion](#)

▶ **Careers**

Stock symbol lookup

Sponsored by:



TSE 300	-3.91	7768.17
DJIA	-41.60	10947.31
S&P500	-8.79	1407.83
Nasdaq	-26.50	3421.3
Montreal	-73.40	3969.3
CDNX	-1.70	1998.3
FTSE100	-80	6612
Nikkei	-292.1	18558.2
HSeng	-84	15377
DJ Net	-7.56	325.24

Delayed 20 minutes. [Help](#).
Services

- ▶ **Full Services Index**
- ▶ Advertise
- ▶ Customer Service
- ▶ Corrections
- ▶ **new** Free Headlines
- ▶ Help & Contact Us
- ▶ Make Us Home
- ▶ Privacy Policy
- ▶ Reprints
- ▶ Subscriptions
- ▶ What's New

Chirowatch, where he publicizes cases in which chiropractors get into trouble or make absurd claims. Though he has nothing against chiropractors -- his wife goes to one -- he says they should only practise what they were trained to do.

"Low back pain, sports medicine and rehabilitation: that's what they should stick to," he says. He is concerned about some chiropractors' claims that they can treat anything from multiple sclerosis to asthma to diabetes. "There's so much antiscience and touchy-feely stuff out there," he says.

According to the Canadian Chiropractic Association, 86 per cent of the work chiropractors do *is* related to the nerves, muscles and bones of the back and spine. Most of the remaining 14 per cent of their work is lifestyle and nutritional counselling. Chiropractic officials admit that a small proportion of chiropractic services is "experimental," but what line of work doesn't have skeletons in its closet? "In every profession, there are people who do things not considered mainstream," says Greg Dunn, executive director of the Canadian Chiropractic Protective Association in Toronto, which covers chiropractors for malpractice.

The chiropractic profession does have a regulatory body -- the Canadian Chiropractic College -- whose job it is to discipline members who are putting patients at risk. But, Ed Barisa, executive director of the Canadian Chiropractic Association, explains a complaint has to be made first. "Yes, it's worrying," he says of the chiropractic fringe. "The association's position is that chiropractic needs to be evidence-based."

Scientific evidence is overwhelmingly on the side of chiropractic manipulation when it comes to helping people deal with back and neck pain, however. Guidelines set by the American Agency for Healthcare Policy and Research, considered the gold standard in both the U.S. and Canada, say that in the absence of red flags pointing to a more sinister condition such as a fracture, tumour or infection, spinal manipulation is indicated for relief of acute back and neck pain.

Simply put, "chiropractors are good at treating mechanical neck and back pain, and not good at everything else," says Dr. Hamilton Hall, chairman and medical director of CBI Health, the parent company of the Canadian Back Institute.

Joanne Wilby, 36, a part-time social worker and mother of two small children, developed neck and shoulder pain and headaches while breastfeeding her first son five and a half years ago. The pain grew worse after she breastfed her second son, born two and a half years ago. "Holding that position made a mess of my shoulder," says Ms. Wilby. She tried physiotherapy, massage and acupuncture before going to her local chiropractor in Toronto last August. "Right away after each treatment I feel a bit of relief and I think I'll keep it up," she says of the visits every two weeks, which cost her \$22.

"Everybody says that there is an IT shortage in Canada, but having recently graduated ... I am still unemployed." [Share your story!](#)

▶ **Mutual Funds**

[RRSP season is here.](#)
[Where are you putting your money?](#)

▶ **Technology**

Show me the E-money!
[Would you trade in your coin for a smart card?](#)

**Related Books**

- [Ailments & Diseases](#)
- [Alternative & Holistic Health](#)
- [Fitness](#)
- [Health - General](#)
- [Health & Fitness](#)
- [Massage & Reflexotherapy](#)
- [Men's Health](#)
- [Nutrition & Diet](#)
- [Self Help](#)
- [Women's Health](#)

Even reports of a link between chiropractic neck adjustments and stroke has not dampened Ms. Wilby's enthusiasm. "I figure people have been doing it for ever and ever and I'm not worried about it," she says.

Chiropractors have been getting a lot of negative press lately about the stroke link. The Stroke Consortium, a network of 100 Canadian medical researchers, is studying cases of stroke that have been linked with chiropractic adjustments. It warns that neck adjustments can stretch and tear the arteries around the neck, causing a clot to form and possibly provoke a stroke. But Terry Sullivan, president of the Institute for Work & Health in Toronto, is quick to point out that the consortium's study does not prove chiropractic neck treatments cause stroke. "A series of cases means nothing. That's not evidence. There is no bullet-proof epidemiological case that links chiropractic neck manipulation with stroke that I'm aware of," he says.

Lawsuits against chiropractors -- and there are plenty of them right now -- may have the effect of making future chiropractic treatments safer. A coroner's inquest recently took place into the death of Laurie Jean Mathiason of Saskatoon who died last February of a stroke after receiving treatment from a chiropractor. The jury did not find that chiropractic treatment was the cause of the death. Still, one of the recommendations from the inquest was to develop screening methods to identify patients who may be at risk for stroke.

A brouhaha has erupted in Toronto that illustrates the depth of negative feeling chiropractors seem capable of attracting. A proposal is afoot to affiliate the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College, one of only two schools of chiropractic in Canada, and York University. Some faculty members at the university feel strongly that the association will tarnish York's academic reputation, and a group of Ontario pediatricians and family doctors have joined forces with them to stop the merger. The issue is not yet resolved. A spokesman for the CMCC said they hope the proposal will be approved by the Senate at York by the end of this academic year.

Chiropractors in Canada, at more than 5,000 strong, have a long way to go before they crack the medical mainstream, but patients don't seem to care. As Mr. Sullivan puts it, "people vote with their feet." This year, the tired feet and aching backs of about four million Canadians -- or 15 per cent of the population -- limped to a chiropractor. That's up by one million since 1996.

The Canadian Chiropractic Association attributes this growth to the arrival of baby boomers into the joints-hurt-after-playing-tennis age group. Having a little disposal income doesn't hurt either: Canadians spend \$750-million a year on chiropractic treatments, although that number includes money from workers' compensation, provincial health and private benefit plans. (Chiropractic spinal treatments are partially covered by provincial health plans in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and

Saskatchewan.)

One of the most controversial areas in chiropractic medicine these days is pediatrics. Chiropractic groups have claimed to be able to successfully treat children's conditions such as ear infections, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bed-wetting and even fever.

Some people are obviously being swayed by that sales pitch. In Ontario alone, almost a million children were taken to a chiropractor in 1996-97, and 132,209 of those were under age four. In Canada, chiropractors bill provincial public health systems almost \$25-million annually for children and teenagers.

Pediatricians have officially denounced the use of chiropractic spinal adjustments to maintain children's health.

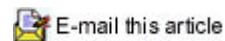
For many adult patients, though, chiropractic treatments are a godsend, but some are confused about the necessity of returning regularly once they feel better, a practice many chiropractors advocate. "You can't make good money treating people only for acute episodes," says Dr. Hall, who believes regular chiropractic appointments cannot prevent back pain -- which occurs in 50 per cent to 80 per cent of people at some point in their lives -- from occurring.

Dr. Hall says many chiropractors promote unnecessary dependency in their patients. "They create this sense that 'I must go or something bad will happen' and that is a huge socioeconomic problem."

Ron Meyers, 52, a human-resources consultant in Toronto, suffers occasionally from low back pain exacerbated by squash. Mr. Meyers switched chiropractors 10 years ago because he didn't like his chiropractor (who was "a bit of a cowboy") or the fact that he was trying to talk Mr. Meyers into visiting every two weeks indefinitely. "Finally I felt, 'Hey, I don't need to come this often',"

Mr. Meyers completely trusts his new chiropractor, who has a much gentler approach.

Trust is definitely one of the most important ingredients in any relationship between a health-care provider and a patient. In a climate of lawsuits, alleged stroke risks, quackery by a few, academic ostracism, and hints of taking advantage of innocent children, it is a difficult time for chiropractors to build up that trust. For adults looking for relief from uncomplicated neck and back pain, though, it seems a good chiropractor and a dose of common sense is worth its weight in gold.



[Subscribe to The Globe and Mail](#)

7 Day Search

Go

[Tips](#) | [What Can I Search For?](#)

[Help & Contact Us](#) | [Copyright © 1999 Globe Information Services](#) | [Back to the top of this page](#)

[Home](#) | [Business](#) | [National](#) | [International](#) | [Sports](#) | [Features](#) | [Arts](#) | [Forums](#) | [Subscribe](#)