

Deadly quacks

J. WILLIAM KINSINGER

Ontario's decision to remove chiropractic care from its roster of publicly-funded health care services has been painted in the press as a purely budgetary choice. In fact, the government's decision was justified on both medical and ethical grounds. For the good of Canadians' health, one can only hope that other provinces follow suit.

Chiropractors are not "doctors," they do not train in any hospital and their medical teachings have been rejected by many universities. Chiropractic treatment is based on the philosophical — not scientific — idea that spinal manipulation can treat just about any illness, including asthma, hypertension in adults, autism in children and ear infections in babies.

The Ontario Chiropractic Association has marketed this idea well, instructing parents to bring newborn babies to chiropractors "as soon after birth as possible," and issuing alarming statements saying that "our children deserve to be treated naturally, not with dangerous chemical drugs and unproven surgeries."

Such specious rhetoric has proven effective. Over the past 10 years, more than \$100-million has been billed by Ontario chiropractors to treat infants and children, using spinal manipulation, for everything from newborn colic to bed-wetting. It has even been presented as an alternative to immunization.

Thankfully, the medical community has moved to debunk such claims. In 1994 and again in 1998, the Chiefs of Pediatrics of Canadian Hospitals rightly stated that spinal manipulation of infants and children is "ineffective and useless." Accordingly, they called on provincial governments to stop paying for the treatment.

Neurologists, meanwhile, have long protested the chiropractic practice of "highest neck manipulation," used frequently on people who have no neck pain whatsoever. Although coroner's inquests have found that highest neck manipulation can cause lethal strokes, chiropractors have



Ne he

By cutting government access to pain and... The management of our health doesn't make sense — not Ontario's claim that money is flawed. First, Deloitte National Health Ontario Chiropractic Association decision to end public funding

Ontario's decision to delist chiropractic services will result in increased pressure on physicians and overcrowded hospital emergency departments

predicts this phenomenon in hospital emergency rooms. Second, the Ontario government's decision to fund the business of chiropractic care and return to self-sufficiency Insurance Board (WSIB) suffering from acute loss from chiropractors. The chiropractors got treated

presented as an alternative to immunization.

Thankfully, the medical community has moved to debunk such claims. In 1994 and again in 1998, the Chiefs of Pediatrics of Canadian Hospitals rightly stated that spinal manipulation of infants and children is "ineffective and useless." Accordingly, they called on provincial governments to stop paying for the treatment.

Neurologists, meanwhile, have long protested the chiropractic practice of "highest neck manipulation," used frequently on people who have no neck pain whatsoever. Although coroner's inquests have found that highest neck manipulation can cause lethal strokes, chiropractors have persisted, claiming that strokes and death occur only rarely.

In fact, such outcomes are not rare, and case reports detailing strokes have been published in numerous respectable medical journals over the past 60 years. Two further reports appeared in 2004 alone. One can only wonder why Ontario waited so long to cut payment for such procedures.

Ontario chiropractors have also been marketing "maintenance care" as a means to sell their services, and have billed for hundreds of millions of dollars by performing spinal manipulation on people who are perfectly well. Wisely, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services

in the United States recently delisted all such claims.

Ontario's decision to delist chiropractic services ought to be permanent. And Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, which still cover the cost of chiropractic treatment, should follow its lead.

Unfortunately, some opposition politicians are making an issue of Ontario's decision. The province's Conservative leader, John Tory, wrote in the *Post* last December that a "visit to a chiropractor costs less than one to a family doctor or an orthopedic surgeon." This is a narrow view: Whether a service is cheap or not matters little if the benefit is dubious and the attendant risks considerable.

Chiropractors misleadingly market themselves as mainstream health care professionals, offer help to those who do not need it and endanger patients by promising results they have neither the training nor the ability to deliver. Ontario has not only saved money by delisting chiropractic services — it has saved lives as well.

National Post

■ J. William Kinsinger is an American physician, and a member of a professional group monitoring government support for alternative medicine.



Neurologists have long protested the practice of 'highest neck manipulation,' which in some cases has resulted in lethal strokes

predicts this phenom
in hospital emergen

Second, the Ontario
ness of chiropractic
and return to self-s
Insurance Board (W
suffering from acut
from chiropractors.
chiropractors got to
recovered more full
practitioners.

Ontario Health
claims that he hasn
providers. Evident
tal News editoria
questions:

"Although or
vices will save
term, who w
be? Who wil
offices, I
time fr
wards p
[chiropr
exactly c
Perhap
ter — on
institul
the 12
Ontari
They
cant we
make

these serv
services wi
scarce fami
emergency dep
the waiting lis
scans. In the end,
the level of access to

The facts are clea
tario's public health
er between people in p
ment. It will increase
pitals, and it will cost
run.

Throughout 2005 a
continue to deliver ne
the people of the provi
are not going away. H
government is abando

■ Dean Wright is pr
Association.

S

Should chiropractic be funded by the provinces? Two writers provide two very different opinions

F CHIROPRACTIC CARE: A DEBATE

y
s

Needed healers

DEAN WRIGHT

practic care
led health
in the
oice. In
was justi-
good of Ca-
ovinces fol-

train in any
rejected by
sed on the
manipula-
hma, hy-
r infec-

rketed
rn ba-
sible,"
ar

Over
en
id
ing
en pre-

ed to
, the
stat-
en is



By cutting funding for chiropractic care, Ontario's government will deny thousands of patients access to an effective treatment for low back pain and other musculoskeletal disorders.

The move by Dalton McGuinty's government doesn't make sense — not in terms of patient care, nor in the management of our health care dollars.

Ontario's claim that delisting chiropractic care will save money is flawed. First, it ignores a report to the contrary by Deloitte National Health Consulting Services, funded by the Ontario Chiropractic Association. The report found that the decision to end public funding for chiropractic care will actually cost Ontario's health care system an additional \$12-million to \$125-million each year.

Ontario's decision to delist chiropractic services will result in increased pressure on physicians and overcrowded hospital emergency departments

Mr. McGuinty's Liberals say they want to shift health care service delivery away from an overreliance on costly hospital stays. On this score, Julie Abelsohn, editor of the monthly newspaper *Hospital News*, asks a telling question: "Without access to chiropractors and physiotherapists, where exactly is a person on a limited budget who is suddenly stricken with debilitating back pain going to go? Straight to the emergency department of their local hospital, that's where." The Deloitte reports

predicts this phenomenon alone will result in a 7-14% increase in hospital emergency room visits.



partment of their local hospital, that's where." The Deloitte reports

predicts this phenomenon alone will result in a 7-14% increase in hospital emergency room visits.

Second, the Ontario government is ignoring the effectiveness of chiropractic care in helping people recover from injury and return to self-sufficiency. Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) has tracked more than 2,000 workers suffering from acute low back injuries who sought treatment from chiropractors. The WSIB found that those who went to chiropractors got treated faster, lost fewer days of work and recovered more fully than those treated by other health-care practitioners.

Ontario Health Minister George Smitherman meekly claims that he hasn't heard such concerns from health-care providers. Evidently, the Minister missed Abelsohn's *Hospital News* editorial, which also added a few more tough questions:

"Although on paper this delisting of [chiropractic] services will save the government \$35-million in the short term, who will estimate what the long-term costs will be? Who will estimate the increased visits to doctor's-offices, hospital emergency departments and lost time from work? And, by the way, if the shift towards preventative medicine doesn't include [chiropractic care and other services] then what exactly does preventative medicine encompass?"

Perhaps Smitherman also failed to read the letter — one of a number sent to him by health care institutions — from the Executive Directors of the 12 Community Health Centres in Eastern Ontario.

They wrote: "Our centres already have significant waiting lists, and this decision will only make the situation worse. We believe that these services are essential. This decision to delist services will result in increased pressure on already scarce family physician resources, and overcrowded emergency departments. Delisting services will add to the waiting lists for joint replacements, MRIs and CT scans. In the end, your government's decision will reduce the level of access to the health care system for all patients."

The facts are clear. Removing chiropractic care from Ontario's public health insurance system will place a new barrier between people in pain and the most effective form of treatment. It will increase the burden on our already crowded hospitals, and it will cost the government more money in the long run.

Throughout 2005 and beyond, Ontario's chiropractors will continue to deliver needed and valuable chiropractic care to the people of the province. As our patients have demanded, we are not going away. However, it is a shame that the Ontario government is abandoning those we treat.

National Post

■ Dean Wright is president of the Ontario Chiropractic Association.