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Chiropractors Really Do Treat Asthma?

By Peter Fysh, DC

In our column last month, we reviewed the chiropractic publications of the past 10 years which pertained to the diagnosis and treatment of asthma. This month, we present the case report of a child whose chronic asthma responded well to regular spinal care.

Case Report

Johnny, five-years-old, had been suffering from bronchial asthma for the past three years. His attacks were now coming daily and he was on increasing doses of medication, which included the bronchodilator spray, Ventolin, and steroids. Johnny's mother was very concerned about her son's condition. She had just been told by Johnny's physician that his medication dosage could not be increased any further at his age, even though his asthma attacks were occurring daily and were quite debilitating.

"Is there anything chiropractic can do for my son's asthma," Johnny's mother asked her chiropractor, almost in desperation. The chiropractor explained that not all cases of asthma responded to spinal adjusting, but that enough did, that would suggest that Johnny should undergo a thorough spinal evaluation. The chiropractor explained that in his experience, the cases that responded best to spinal adjusting were those which commenced at a young age, like Johnny's. Chiropractic seeks simply to restore normal function to the spine and nervous system, and if that is part of Johnny's problem, then we should see some appropriate response. The chiropractor further explained that working with the spine was not always a quick solution for asthma and that improvement in Johnny's condition might come gradually over a period of months. During this time, Johnny would probably need to be evaluated each week and should certainly continue with his prescribed medications. To a parent who had cared for her son through the many helpless nights of asthma, the slightest prospect of success was acceptable.

Johnny was evaluated by the chiropractor, found to have problems in several areas of his spine, and was started on a course of chiropractic treatment. Johnny, like so many patients with chronic bronchial problems, was found to have an anterior dishing of the spine in the midscapular region, a phenomenon which had been identified by F. Pottenger, M.D., British, last century.¹ In Johnny's case, his spinal problems were mainly confined to the thoracic region, with occasional adjustments to the upper cervicals and to the lumbar spine and pelvis.

Johnny's response to the treatment showed a gradual improvement in his condition. After four weeks of treatment, his mother reported that the asthma attacks were now less intense, even though they still came every day. After six weeks of treatment his attacks were now down to three days a week. After eight weeks of treatment, Johnny visited his physician for further evaluation. To the delight of his mother, Johnny's steroid medication was reduced by half. Chiropractic care continued on a weekly basis, with very light spinal thrusts being applied to the midscapular spinal region and specific cervical adjustments being made, as indicated by palpation, about every second week.

After Johnny had been undergoing chiropractic care for four months, his asthma attacks were quite mild but still occurring about every second week. About this time, he again visited his physician for evaluation of his medication. This time his steroids were discontinued, and he was advised to continue with the aerosol inhaler daily. Johnny was now being seen only every other week by the chiropractor. After six months care, Johnny had stopped using his Ventolin inhaler, but his mother still carried it everywhere they went, just as a precaution.

Johnny's case is not unusual in chiropractic. It is one of thousands of similar case reports on file in chiropractors' offices throughout the country. The sad part is that there are possibly millions of asthmatic children in the world who are destined to a life dependent upon medication, children who, because of close-minded attitudes and politics in the health care profession, will never have the chance to see if chiropractic spinal adjustments can help their asthma and so provide a better quality of life.

Conclusion

Should chiropractors treat children for asthma? According to some so-called authorities, chiropractors should only treat back pain. Who should decide what conditions are treatable by chiropractic spinal adjustments? Surely it is the field doctor viewing the results of the treatments and the response of various disorders to chiropractic care.

If just one chiropractor evaluates and adjusts the spine of a child who has chronic asthma, and that child responds to the regular treatments by having future attacks of asthma which are less intense and less frequent, or better yet, no asthma at all, then surely it would seem appropriate for that chiropractor to try to help other children similarly afflicted.

References

1. Pottenger F: Symptoms of Visceral Disease. Moseby, St. Louis, 1944.

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