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## **D.D. Palmer and Chiropractic Foot Care**

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One of the benefits of the approaching centennial is the opportunity to take stock of our roots, and perhaps to rediscover the breadth of our potential contributions to health care. Foot care is one such neglected area of chiropractic, and is only now causing reawakened interest among DCs through the efforts of the postgraduate division of Cleveland Chiropractic College L.A. Despite the efforts of the Association for the History of Chiropractic, many such forgotten parameters of chiropractic practice have yet to be explored.

"Old Dad Chiro" had a keen interest in the diagnosis and treatment of foot disorders. Although Palmer believed that most disease was caused by vertebral subluxations, he was explicit in identifying what he believed were the primary causes of most other disorders: "...displaced bones, other than those of the vertebral column, more especially those of the tarsus, metatarsus, and phalanges ..." (Palmer, 1910, pp 56).

So far as we have been able to determine, the first instance of D.D. Palmer's intervention for a painful foot condition was recorded in a letter by Nellie Richardson, dated September 10, 1896 (Keating et al., 1992). The letter describes Palmer's adjustment of foot joints to relieve pain on the dorsal part of her arch, a painful "instep." Unfortunately, the method of adjustment Palmer employed is not known, because the "magnetic manipulator" was rather secretive in this time period, and was concerned that competitors would steal his methods (Keating, 1991). We do know that D.D. was aware of the bonesetting traditions of Great Britain and New England, and Gielow documents that he had studied bonesetting methods for the extremities (Gielow, 1981). The methods of bonesetter Sweet in treating the injured foot of a Mrs. Garrison were mentioned by the Palmers in 1906: "After an unsatisfactory consultation with several surgeons they returned to Hartford where one of the Sweets lived. He speedily adjusted the bones of the foot as if by magic. Mrs. Garrison was enthusiastic in praising his ability." (Palmer & Palmer, 1906, pp 191.)

Even during this early period in "Old Dad Chiro's" conceptual development, he was concerned with alignment of the entire skeletal frame and defined chiropractic as:

"The science of the cause of disease and the art of adjusting by hand all subluxations of the 300 articulations of the human skeletal frame." (Palmer & Palmer, 1906, Introduction.)

"The skeletal frame constitutes the stability of the human body. Just in proportion as its part are in normal apposition, its health condition is unwavering ... the chiropractor determines upon his first visit what portion of the skeletal frame has been disarranged by a wrench ... then replaces the displaced part to its normal position." (Palmer & Palmer, 1906, pp 14-30.) D.D. Palmer was pleased with chiropractors who could adjust the foot:

"Dr. Arnold, so I am told, adjusts ribs and tarsal bones, as well as vertebrae, with ease ..." (Palmer, 1910, pp 672.)

The father of chiropractic exhorted first generation DCs not to turn away patients with foot problems. In reply to a letter from a field practitioner Palmer wrote:

"I presume the writer of the above turned these cripples away without benefit to them or himself. I have taken in quite a number of dollars and relieved many of these cripples instead of sending them to the toe-butchers. Bunions and corns can be relieved by adjusting the contiguous joints. For those on the plantar surface, adjust the displaced tarsal bones." (Palmer, 1910, pp 782.)

Palmer demonstrated a serious, scholarly interest in foot conditions:

"The skeleton of the foot consists of tarsus, metatarsus, and phalanges. The bones of the tarsus are seven in number. Their action is of slight gliding movement against each other. Like other joints, they are supplied with ligaments, fasciae and synovial membranes. There are no foramina to be censured for ailments, and no intervertebral disks to be thinned by compression. Although the ligaments which hold the tarsal bones together are of great strength, dislocation occasionally occurs. Such displacements cause "sprained feet" -- nerves stretched and inflamed. The portion of the plantar surface in which the nerves end, forms calluses, and the part of the foot in which the bone is displaced becomes quite painful. By replacing the displaced bone the ... distress disappears." (Palmer, 1914, pp 93.)

"Old Dad Chiro" also recognized that foot joints could become quite stiff. In describing ankylosis he noted:

"It may be cartilaginous, ligamentous, muscular or bony. Chiropractors have to deal with these conditions, more especially in the vertebral column and the toe joints. Daily thrusting against the ankylosed joint will

eventually loosen it; a continuation will remove the roughness." (Palmer, 1910, pp 916.)

In writing of corns and bunions, Palmer noted:

"Corns and bunions come from luxated joints ... where the joints are not ankylosed, they may be replaced by one move, and the pain disappears at once." (Palmer, 1910, pp 354.)

"Bunions and corns exist because of displaced joints of the feet. Replace the joint where the corn or bunion is found and enlargement will disappear. This may require one or many adjustments, depending upon whether the ankylosis is present or not." (Palmer, 1910, pp 228.)

In fact, one of D.D. Palmer's most famous and often quoted statements actually concerns adjusting foot joints:

"I have never found it beneath my dignity to do anything to relieve human suffering. The relief given bunions and corns by adjusting is proof positive that subluxated joints do cause disease." (Palmer, 1910, pp 322.)

Palmer's concept of nerve impingement (and decidedly not nerve entrapment) extended to the foot: "... a displaced tarsal or metatarsal bone impinges upon and inflames nerves ... remove the pressure from the nerve by replacing the displaced bone." (Palmer, 1910, pp 315-316.)

Today, some of "Old Dad Chiro" claims appear quite extreme; for instance, his statements concerning the cure and straightening of corns and bunions. On the other hand, Palmer's claims to be able to relieve painful conditions of the foot have found at least private, empirical support among medical, osteopathic, and chiropractic authors (Hiss, 1949; Mennell, 1969; Shafer & Faye, 1989). Unfortunately, the founder's interest in foot care is not well-known among modern chiropractors. Ironically, his writings about the assessment and care of foot conditions are exceeded perhaps only by his interest in the spine. Surely, D.D. Palmer deserves recognition as the first chiropractic foot doctor.

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If you are interested in joining the Association for the History of Chiropractic, please contact Alana Callender, M.S., Executive Director, 1000 Brady Street, Davenport, Iowa 52803, USA.

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