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The Mission: Educating Families about Chiropractic

By Rose Jacobs, CA

As chiropractic assistants, we serve our doctors and clinics in two capacities: assisting in administrative procedures and policies that manage the "business" of the clinic; and educating our patients and others in our community about the benefits of chiropractic care. In this article, I want to focus on our second responsibility, specifically, educating parents and children about the optimal health benefits of chiropractic care.

While lecturing around the country, I have been amazed to find that the majority of clinic staff members claim to serve in a "family practice clinic." To my surprise, the percentage of children they served was very low. When I polled the attendees in my classrooms and asked, "What percentage of the clinic's patients (on an average business day) are patients from newborn to the age of 16?", I could not believe the answers. The answers I received were 10% to 20%.

"Strict" pediatric chiropractic clinics are not included in these polls. Mind you, these are just the clinics that claim to serve families (mothers, fathers and their children). If the average family chiropractic clinic's patient base is only 10 to 20% children, why aren't more children in these clinics? The answer is the lack of education and communication with parents and other adults that receive care in these clinics. The clinic's staff is not spreading the knowledge about the benefits of chiropractic care within our practices and communities.

Now, I may well be getting up on a soapbox, but I can no longer be silent and allow our profession to complain about the lack of "new patients" while there are hundreds of thousands of children to care for sitting home while their moms and dads are simply ignorant and/or misinformed of the benefits we have to offer. CAs, it is our responsibility to serve our profession, and I believe it is a true disservice to keep quiet and not spread the word. We must speak out and educate. Children have spines, too. If you do not think a

child could possibly have a vertebral subluxation, you obviously have no idea what a newborn goes through during a "normal birthing process."

While working as an obstetrics nurse years ago, I witnessed firsthand the trauma placed on a newborn's cervical spine during delivery. I think it is possible that infants develop their first subluxations at this time. The only way this condition can be detected is to have the children evaluated by chiropractic physicians. The question, CAs, is this: Are you communicating this effectively to the adults in your clinic and your communities? If you are, why don't more mothers and fathers bring their children into the clinic? CAs, your doctor(s) need your help with caring for children inside the clinic. Children need and deserve to have the same optimal health benefits as their parents, don't you think?

For CAs and doctors know chiropractic care for our children's spines is every bit as important as caring for adult spines, I am here to help. I hope you will utilize some of my ideas and recommendations (and develop some of your own) to help your clinic accomplish "the mission."

I see a need to educate parents and adults in these following areas:

1. **Why do children need chiropractic care?** If parents and other adults - for example, other family members such as grandparents, friends and teachers - understand good spinal health is important to achieve an optimal health potential, would it not be the same for a child's as well? Yes, children have spines, too, and they need to be maintained so the child can experience optimal health.
2. **Are chiropractic adjustments and procedures safe for children?** Parents and other adults need to have this issue addressed. Just because the parent is confident that chiropractic adjustments and procedures are safe for their health needs, do not assume they may not question these procedures for their children. CAs, it is your professional and ethical duty to address these questions and concerns during your clinic's patient education processes. Yes, chiropractic adjustments and procedures are safe for children.
3. **How do children act and respond to chiropractic care and the chiropractic adjustment?** Parents and adults need to understand that children can be fearful and cautious of the unknown. It is significant to parents and adults to know that the chiropractor will be gentle and caring with all children under their care. The doctor will take special time in evaluating and caring for the children he/she serves.

Most children respond quite favorably and quickly to chiropractic adjustments. Once a child experiences the loving care of a chiropractic adjustment, children enjoy and look forward to that care.

Second, communicate directly with the children about the truth and benefits of chiropractic health care. Do this by holding children's workshops and story times in the clinic and serving at health fairs, schools and community events. Gear the information to ages 4-10. During these workshops, educate them in the following areas:

1. What does a chiropractor do? Chiropractors have been finding and correcting vertebral subluxations since 1895.
2. What is a vertebral subluxation? With a plastic spine, show the children the spine, vertebrae and nerves. Show what a vertebra looks like on the plastic spine when the vertebrae is misaligned and pinching a nerve. I also use the "rubber band around the finger" example to show what a vertebral subluxation may be doing to the nerve(s) affected by a subluxation. (Children can easily relate to these visual examples.)
3. What does a chiropractic adjustment feel like? I recommend all family practice clinics have an "adjustable bear" or other chiropractic toy to demonstrate what children may expect from to receive an adjustment. With this type of example, the children can pretend to give the toy an adjustment while hearing and feeling a "popping" sound. When not teaching the workshop, the toy can be used by the chiropractor to help eliminate a child's anxiety prior to giving an adjustment. It is important when using a chiropractic toy to be sure to tell the children that the toy is just for pretend and that they should never pretend to adjust a real person. Only a licensed chiropractor can adjust people safely.
4. What can children and their parents do to help maintain optimal health potential for themselves? This is an area in which the educator (CA/DC) needs to explain the "four essentials to sustain human life." Nutrition is fourth; water is third; oxygen is second; and proper nerve conduction is first.

From this model, explain on a child's intellect what this means. It is important to eat nutritional foods. This would include little or no junk foods; lots of fruits and vegetables; well-balanced meals; and possibly supplemental vitamins. If possible, the human body can sustain itself for several weeks without food before the body begins to shut down. It is essential to drink plenty of water every day. The human body can only live several days without water before the body will begin to shut down from dehydration.

Oxygen is necessary to live. The human body must take in oxygen to keep the brain, organs and cells alive and healthy. The human body can function a few minutes without oxygen before the body's organs, tissues and cells begin to shut down.

Proper nerve conduction is vital. No human organ, tissue or cell can live without proper nerve conduction. If you completely cut though the nerves that supply the life force to an organ, such as the heart, the life force stops and cannot be patched up or put back together again. This is why it is so important to take care of our spines and make sure they stay as healthy and unsubluxated as possible. Subluxations will not likely cut the life force to a body's organ, but a subluxation that is not detected and corrected may put a twisting, stretching and/or scraping on a nerve. These types of lesions may cause damage or irritation, possibly affecting the body in negative ways. Having periodic checkups and adjustments from your family's chiropractor can help keep the body's life force flowing to all of your organs, tissues and cells.

I also recommend having an envelope with fun educational items to give the children to take home. I recommend including a chiropractic-themed coloring book, a couple of chiropractic stickers, and a ribbon or certificate stating that they are now an "official chiropractic health ambassador" with their name filled in.

CAs, I know "the mission" is not easy. It will take some planning and organizing, but it will all be worth it, don't you think? For the CAs and clinics that would like my professional recommendations on chiropractic produced supplies to develop your own children's workshop, please send me an e-mail. I will do my best to lead you in the right direction.

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