

New Pilot on Quality Shows Cost-Effectiveness of Chiropractic Care for Musculoskeletal Disorders

A new pilot program shows that conservative health care, including chiropractic, may reduce overall health care costs in patients with musculoskeletal disorders, such as back and neck pain. The pilot, conducted by Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield to measure quality of patient care for its members in Iowa and South Dakota, also shows promising outcomes for the patients choosing chiropractic and other conservative care.

“The cost-effectiveness and safety of chiropractic has been documented in several studies. ACA is pleased that insurance companies are starting to recognize the value that doctors of chiropractic and other conservative providers can offer to their members,” said ACA President Glenn Manceaux, DC. “Especially during the health care reform debate, it’s important that chiropractic and other conservative care methods are taken into serious consideration as a cost-effective alternative to the utilization of expensive surgery and hospital-based care,” he added.

Wellmark conducted the Physical Medicine Pilot on Quality in 2008 for Iowa and South Dakota physical medicine providers. A total of 238 chiropractors, physical therapists and occupational therapists provided care to 5,500 members with musculoskeletal disorders. According to Wellmark, data from participating clinicians show that 89 percent of the patients treated in the pilot reported a greater than 30-percent improvement in 30 days.

The pilot compared data for Wellmark members who received care from doctors of chiropractic or physical therapists with a member population with similar demographics who did not receive such services. The comparison showed that those who received chiropractic care or physical therapy were less likely to have surgery and experienced lower total health care costs, according to Wellmark.

Chiropractic is widely recognized as one of the safest non-invasive therapies available for the treatment of back pain, neck pain, headaches and other neuromusculoskeletal complaints. A significant amount of evidence shows that chiropractic care for certain conditions can be more effective and less costly than traditional medical care. Recent research includes:

- A study published in the October 2005 issue of the *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics (JMPT)* found that chiropractic and medical care have comparable costs for treating chronic low-back pain, with chiropractic care producing significantly better outcomes.
- A March 2004 study in *JMPT* found that chiropractic care is more effective than medical care at treating chronic low-back pain in patients’ first year of symptoms.
- A study published in a 2003 edition of the medical journal *Spine* found that manual manipulation provides better short-term relief of chronic spinal pain than do a variety of medications.

From the American Chiropractic Association (ACA)