



CHIRO / PHYSIO / OSTEOPATHY

By Craig Osborne, Chiropractor © 2010

Ever wondered what the difference is? Can't figure out what should be used for what? Then join the club, it's not an easy question to answer but it's one I get asked often.

The answer is made more difficult as not all practitioners within one profession do the same thing, so you might find one chiropractor who's more like a physio, or an osteo who only adjusts and so seems more like a chiropractor.

However, in an attempt to define them, I hope you find this useful...

CHIROPRACTIC

DD Palmer is credited as the father of chiropractic, who in 1895 adjusted the spine of a janitor at a local school in the US who was then apparently cured of his deafness. The exact nature of this treatment is somewhat clouded, but it definitely marks the founding of the profession.

It was his son BJ Palmer who really got the ball rolling in the early 20th century and defined the philosophy of chiropractic. It's fought off many battles with the medical profession especially in America, and it's this long winded battle that underlies many of the negative attitudes which still persist among the more conservative of medical doctors.

Chiropractic's focus is on identifying vertebral (spine) subluxations, and correcting these through manual techniques.



Subluxations are unhealthy because they cause irritation of the nervous system, and interference to the flow of information along nerves

will reduce the ability of the body to respond to stimuli and your health

will be affected. There are a range of techniques in use, ranging from the manipulative style that I use that commonly results in joint cavitation (or clicking), drop piece tables, activator, motorized distraction tables, wedges, soft tissue release and many low force techniques. While some styles may not suit everyone, because the intention is to allow the body to function better, all the techniques have amazing outcomes for most patients.

It's becoming increasingly accepted that the most common forms of back pain are functional problems, and infrequently a problem when something needs to be physically repaired. The chiropractic philosophy has always been about restoring function, and it's interesting that only relatively recently is science catching up with what has always been taught in chiropractic.

OSTEOPATHY

Osteopathy originated in the United States in the mid 19th century, and early on had links to the chiropractic profession, which was also in its infancy. Its early philosophy was to enhance the body's immune system by improving lymphatic and blood circulation. Like chiropractic it is traditionally non-invasive and aims to allow the body to heal better naturally. You may often find osteopaths that are also naturopaths / homeopaths or suggest this type of treatment.



In the US, it became part of the medical fraternity and now osteopaths in the US are doctors with specialist training in osteopathic techniques. Treatment is now more aligned with traditional medical techniques there. In Australia it remains an independent profession so tends to be true to its roots. Most

osteopaths will use soft tissue and massage techniques, while some use manipulative techniques as well. As with any manipulative technique, I believe x-rays are an important safety issue and should be used by any therapist who manipulates.

Cranial Osteopathy utilises gentle techniques to help align the suture joints in the skull and appears to have excellent results for some problems. Cranial-facial techniques are used by some chiropractors as well.

If you're traveling it's worth noting that in some countries there is no government recognition of chiropractic or osteopathy. This doesn't affect the quality of a well trained therapist, but it means you may get treatment from someone with limited training who simply decided to set up shop. Several countries in the EU including France have only recently recognized chiropractic in legislation.

PHYSIOTHERAPY

Physiotherapists are soft tissue and joint rehabilitation therapists. This encompasses both spinal and peripheral joints, and the muscles, tendons, and ligaments that support and control these joints. They use a wide variety of manual techniques such as high velocity manipulations, low velocity mobilizations, massage, ultrasound and interferential. Treatment also extends to addressing muscle imbalances through postural education, stretching and strengthening muscles, and exercise based rehabilitation. They are also licensed to order x-rays.



TREATMENT SIMILARITIES

Guidelines from around the world have been written for the treatment of spinal pain problems. They almost always agree that you need

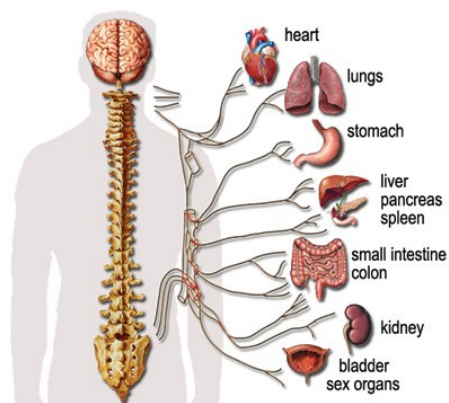
1. Spinal adjusting
2. Patient reassurance and return to normal activities of daily living (ADLs)
3. Exercises and rehabilitation

This regime is considered the gold standard for thorough treatment of most spinal conditions.

In addition it is acceptable that 3 visits per week for 2 weeks to begin with is a valid starting point. If there is no change then an additional 2 weeks of 3 times per week is to follow with a different technique. If it doesn't change with that treatment type, it looks like it may never and an alternative should be used.

IS ONE BETTER?

The differential if you consider manipulation, is not the technique itself, but why it is being done and with what goal. It would be fair to say that a physio is manipulating a joint to remove adhesions and improve joint motion. Chiropractic is about stimulating the neurology of your body to enhance natural healing. Chiropractors look for subluxations, no other profession does this. This means that chiropractic has a huge wellness drive underlying everything that is done, and is not just about pain relief but achieving optimal health.




Okay so you already know I'm biased, but here's some of what's

supporting chiropractic...

Research Support

There are five government studies from around the world that concluded that most back pain complaints stem from functional problems with the joints of the spine, and concluded therefore that as specialist in the field, **chiropractic care is the treatment of choice.**

Fitting in with the Health System

Use of chiropractic was seen to be dramatically cheaper than other treatments, typically 50-60% less, however with minimal risk, virtually no cost with medications and associated treatment costs, and least likely to have recurrence of the problem in the long run. A study in the early 90's even recommended that Medicare in Australia should be extended to include chiropractic for these reasons. This has started but only as part of the  safety net and may

never become part of the full Medicare system. In fact the problem is that the current health model simply cannot afford to offer more, in the long run we will have to see a dramatic shift in health policy towards wellness. The current public health model is incredibly expensive, and is economically unsustainable.

In the USA, chiropractic is now available for the armed forces. It's truly becoming mainstream health care.

Cost Benefits Of Chiropractic

A major study in California studied 1.7 million claims over 4 years for people in a health fund. Some findings included:

- a) For those treated for nerve/muscle/joint conditions, total health care costs were 13% lower for those with chiropractic coverage than those without. The cost of treating low back pain was 28% lower in the chiropractic group.
- b) Those with chiropractic coverage had
 - fewer hospital bed stays

- fewer MRIs
- fewer x-rays
- lower rate of back surgery

So for this health fund, inclusion of chiropractic in its plan resulted in less demand on traditional health services and a saving to the fund. It was calculated that if all the members had chiropractic coverage (and used it), the fund would have saved \$47.5 million over the 4 years of the study.

When you consider the frailties of the Australian Health system as it stands, a saving as large as this would go a long to paying for services that are in short supply.

YOUR SOLUTION

One challenge I face in practice is the tendency to diagnose by google, and to expect that natural therapies like Chiropractic have the capacity to stop your body have painful symptoms immediately.



On occasion I will have a client who expresses a problem that they did not feel 'fixed' after one treatment. Unfortunately this illustrated to me the depth to which the quick-fix thinking of the medical approach has affected the population.

Most health problems we face are because of poor habits and bad patterns such as bad diets, lack of exercise and poor posture. None of these will change in an instant. Recognising the options available to correct these issues will lead to a far better state of health in the long term. It just takes time, a resource that is often in short supply.

