

# Technologies Can Not Only Help Support Your Chiropractic Diagnosis; They Can Also Reinforce The Need For Continuing Patient Care

by Vicki Nuber



## Are you effectively utilizing your diagnostic equipment to enhance patient retention?

If you see patients scale back their adjustment schedule as soon as they start experiencing relief from their pain, then there is a chance they might not understand your long-term goals for their care. If your long-term goals for your patients are improved mobility, more stability, increased function, and a better quality of life, then you need tools to help you measure patient progress and more clearly communicate those goals. With clinical diagnostic tools that guide patient management, more of your patients will understand and be able to visualize and embrace the larger concept of chiropractic prevention and wellness.

## The genesis of communication breakdowns

The first breakdown in patient understanding often begins during the chiropractic exam. With the paperwork, interviews, vital signs, orthopedics, range-of-motion, and possibly x-rays, it is a long process that rivals an in-depth physical from a general practitioner. But if the exam doctor isn't performing a non-

pain based chiropractic assessment to set up a chiropractic reevaluation, then an opportunity has been lost. Medicine's primary goal is to manage the symptoms of the chief complaint, so if you only talk to your patients about their symptoms and measure only their symptoms at their exam, they will assume that is your goal also.

The next breakdown happens when a chiropractor fails to share their plan of care with their patients. You may have the most comprehensive and easy-to-understand report of findings that allows you to easily connect-the-dots between your patients complaint and the problem mechanics of their spine, but if you aren't communicating your long-term goals and connecting those goals to an improved quality of life, then the patient will assume their problem mechanics are no longer a problem when their chief complaint eases. If reducing the frequency and duration of pain is your primary goal, then you can't blame the patient for dropping-out when that happens.



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exam. Without the improvement of pain, without the communication of your long-term goals, and without the routine use of a non-pain based assessment, the re-exam can get lost in the shuffle or forgotten as the patient restricts their visits to pain-based care only.

#### **Beyond pain-based assessments**

Pain based assessments are critical for chiropractic practice but cannot be the only assessments you offer if you're concerned about your

postural assessments, balance assessments, and gait analysis are several of the more well-known. None of these particular technologies require that a patient be in pain or be experiencing intermittent pain to show a need for care or even improvement in care. When they are included in your overall chiropractic protocol, from first exam to return visits to the progressive re-exam, the patient understands that pain is only one part of the big picture.

Further, many of these technologies help you meet the challenges you face in communicating your concern for a patient's total well-being. Many come with patient education portions to help your patients understand the science behind the technology and why it is used in your practice. They engage the patient and create a visual opportunity for the patient to see how their spine is related to more than just their pain.

#### **Support your chiropractic diagnosis**

If you believe your care shouldn't just be limited to those who are in pain or those who are unhealthy, then you need more than just symptom-based assessments in your practice. Pain assessments are important in establishing need for care in many instances, but it can become the only justification for a visit in your patient's mind if you are not focusing on the equally important aspects of mobility, strength, and overall quality of life.

If you're tired of losing patients before they reach the full potential of your care, then it's time to expand your assessment to include other objective measures of function. Utilize your clinical diagnostic tools and testing to help your patients understand, visualize and embrace the larger concept of chiropractic prevention and wellness.

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#### **► Communication breakdowns continue**

The third breakdown occurs when a chiropractor fails to re-affirm the reasons for regular office visits even when a patient is not experiencing any pain. It's very easy to say, "I'm glad you came in today, Tom, because these joints are quite inflamed." It's harder to say, "I'm glad you came into the office today, Tom, because even though you're feeling better, your mobility is still limited and we need to work on that."

Finally, the last breakdown is an inevitable consequence of the first three — the failure of the doctor to follow-through on a progressive re-

patient's strength, mobility, and functionality. The introduction of non-pain based assessments at the first exam, through each return visit, and then during a progressive re-exam can help communicate and show that chiropractic is ultimately about maintaining a better quality of life. The question is, "Which non-pain based assessment will you choose?"

The profession has a long history of unique technologies and functional tests that are used in order to evaluate patient presentation and monitor progress. Thermographic scanners, thermographic imaging, digital inclinometry, sEMG, x-ray analysis,