



Are You Effectively Using Your

Diagnostic & Testing Tools?

by Lucy Butler

Diagnostic technology and testing affect all aspects of a chiropractic practice. Clinical decisions, patient management, scope of practice, patient education, and even marketing are all influenced by diagnostic technology, analytical devices and objective measurements doctors bring to their patient care. Chiropractors have been inventing, advocating, and debating the use of tools and tests since the earliest days of chiropractic, and while the technology has advanced over the past century, it is remarkable how the principles behind the technology have largely remained the same.

Are you effectively using 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, 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 goal and that progress. 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.

What is the genesis of communication breakdowns? The first breakdown in patient understanding often begins during the chiropractic exam. With all of the paperwork, interviews, vital signs, orthopedics, range-of-motion, and possibly x-rays, it can be a lengthy process that rivals an in-depth physical from a general practitioner. But if the exam doctor is not performing a non-pain based chiropractic assessment to set up a chiropractic re-evaluation, 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 during their exam, they will assume that is also your goal.

The second breakdown occurs 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 patient's complaints and the problem mechanics of their spine, but if you are not communicating your long-term goals and connecting those goals to an im-

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proved 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 cannot blame the patient for dropping out of care when that happens.

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

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And finally, the last breakdown is an inevitable consequence of the first three — the failure of the doctor to follow through on a progressive re-exam. Without the reduction 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 the strength, mobility, and functionality of your patients. The introduction of non-pain based assessments at the first exam stage, through each return visit, and then during a progressive re-exam can help you to better communicate and demonstrate that chiropractic is ultimately about maintaining ongoing and optimal wellbeing and a better quality of life in the long run. The question is, "Which non-pain based assessment will you choose?"

Chiropractic has a long history of innovative 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, postural assessments, balance assessments, and gait analyses are among the best-known and most commonly-used technologies. None of these require that a patient be in pain or be experiencing intermittent pain to show a need for care or even improvement in care; however, when these tools are included in your overall chiropractic protocol, from first exam to return visits to the progressive re-exam, the patient better understands that pain is only one part of the big picture.

Moreover, many of these technologies help you meet the challenges you face in communicating your concern for your patient's overall well-being. Many come with patient

education adjuncts to help your patients better understand the science behind the technology and why it is used in your practice; these educational tools serve to engage the patient and create a visual opportunity for the patient to see, for example, how their spine is related to more than just their pain.

Support your chiropractic diagnosis. If you believe that your care should not be limited to only those patients who are in pain or those who are generally unhealthy, then you need more than just symptom-based assessments in your practice. Pain assessment is 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, overall wellbeing, and ultimately your patient's long-term quality of life.

If you are tired of losing patients before they reach the full potential of your care, then it's time that you examine and accordingly expand your assessment to include other objective measures of function. Utilize your clinical diagnostic tools and testing protocols to help your patients better understand, visualize and embrace the broader concept of chiropractic prevention and wellness. Not only is this likely to help you retain patients but also it will probably help increase patient referrals, and perhaps even help you become the go-to chiropractor in your community.

About The Author: Lucy Butler is associate publisher of Chiropractic Products.