

PATIENT EDUCATION

by William Esteb



Before I share with you two revolutionary patient education tools you've probably never heard of, let me put them in proper context. Because, in case you haven't noticed, Google has changed everything. Not only has it affected the attention spans of today's patients but it has also increased the availability of chiropractic information, both the good and the bad. This profoundly affects how you should educate patients these days.

So, it is not business as usual; there's been a radical shift. It didn't happen overnight but the effect is just as disorienting, especially if you would like to attract and keep patients who value their health and have the means to pay for it.

Readily-available videos on YouTube have made showing a series of patient education videos in your practice a sales overture. And at first glance, it appears that Wikipedia has made your brochure rack obsolete. (For educating patients it is obsolete, but your brochures are still useful for helping your patients refer others.) Bottom line? It's a brave new world; the key is to adapt to this new environment.

Why You Must Educate Today's Patients

Your patient education overtures need to acknowledge that most patients bring with them the allopathic world view that permeates our culture. In other words, patients bring you their particular ache or pain and want you to eliminate it. This is the practice of medicine – for which you are probably not licensed or insured.

Granted, your state's practice act will permit you to use chiropractic adjustments to alleviate a patient's symptoms. And insurance carriers expect you to do just that, but it is an "off-label" use of chiropractic, which was never about neck and back pain.



Thus, you need effective patient education now more than ever. It can help set appropriate patient expectations; create the proper context for your adjustments; make meaning of the patient's symptoms; enhance the healing process; increase patient satisfaction; and equip your patients to be better referral ambassadors for your practice. And that's unlikely to result from yakking at patients in front of your X-ray view box or having a one-sided conversation when their heads are wedged in the headrest paper on your adjusting table.

Using Media To Leverage Your Time

Since the earliest days of chiropractic, there has been a keen interest in educating the public and patients about chiropractic. This education was critical to the development of chiropractic since, even back then, the prevailing culture was steeped in allopathic thinking. These patient education overtures have evolved over the past century, as has our media landscape:

1901 – Newspapers

The dominant media outlet over a century ago was the tabloid newspaper. D. D. Palmer made use of the large printed format to produce newspapers extolling the virtues of the new discipline called "chiropractic."

1903 – Posters

Newspapers morphed into a variety of wall posters that often had a P. T. Barnum flavor, full of hyperbole and hope.

1928 – Radio

As radio became more popular, B. J. Palmer took to the airways with his WOC transmitter and broadcast the “World of Chiropractic” far and wide from atop the hill in Davenport, Iowa.

1936 – Brochures

The print shop at Palmer College ran around the clock, producing brochures, pamphlets, leaflets and all manner of handouts for the growing number of chiropractors to use to edify their patients.

1981 – Video

Renaissance International harnessed the power of the VCR to create an engaging series of patient education videos starring Peter Graves and other Hollywood notables.

1990 – Film

When the movie *Jacob’s Ladder*, which featured the largely positive portrayal of a chiropractor, came out, it was exciting and affirming.

1996 – Internet and Email

With the development of the Internet and email, chiropractic patient communications took on a new level of sophistication. For better or worse, these new methods of communication have highlighted the unusually wide range of diversity across the profession.

2016 – Gamification

The use of game thinking and game mechanics in non-game contexts such as patient education can serve to improve engagement, comprehension and learning, an example of which is illustrated in subsequent text.

2018 – SMS Texting

The latest patient education development is to use short, pithy, to-the-point 144-character statements sent to the patient’s smartphone or digital device. (More about the potential of this new strategy further on in this article.)

Gamification Enhances Patient Engagement

The gamification of patient education became a reality in 2016, one example being the creation of BackScratchers, the result of a simple question asked back in 1999, i.e. “How can the Socratic method be harnessed for patient education with little or no involvement from the chiropractor?” The answer was to combine short trivia questions like those in the popular board game *Trivial Pursuit* with the ability to hide and then reveal the correct answer via the technology used in scratch-off lottery tickets.

A deck of BackScratcher Cards features 60 different

designs and chiropractic messages. On the back is a Socratic question or sentence completion with four multiple-choice answers. Patients scratch off the answer they think is correct, testing their understanding. It’s the critical thinking provoked by having to decide which circle to scratch off that truly educates patients. Plus, the level of engagement this process involves can often prompt fascinating questions and an educational dialogue that rarely happens with other types of technologies.

Because gamifying chiropractic principles in this way is fun and lighthearted, patients are more likely to serve themselves when the cards are placed in a highly-trafficked area of your practice. There is no pressure; the patients who are interested participate, and those who aren’t, do not.

eTEXT Chiropractic Patient Education

Probably the most exciting innovation in chiropractic patient education is the utilization of the texting function of a patient’s smartphone to deliver short messages based on the patient’s journey, from symptoms to relief to wellness.



While emailing patient education concepts is of value, delivery and open-rates rarely exceed 25%, whereas text message open-rates often reach 98% or higher, i.e. texting your patient education message is almost four times as likely to actually reach your patients.

It’s worth noting that this high level of connection comes with some notable benefits and constraints:

HIPAA compliance: Not an issue, since you don’t use their name or any other identifiable personal information.

Patient opt-in: Having patients enroll themselves, literally while standing at your practice’s front desk, makes opt-in quick and easy.

Message brevity: Reducing chiropractic principles down to 144 characters (including spaces) is not for the faint of mind or heart.

A message sent during the early days of a patient’s care might look like this:

All Support Belts Are Not Created Equal!



The Shape that Fits

We have three patents to back you up!

Contour Support Belt

- PATENTED hip and rib contour for extra comfort
- PATENTED one way velcro closure for exact fit
- PATENTED downward angle design
- Wide in front for extra abdominal support
- 2 year warranty
- Custom sizes available
- Suspenders and BIOFLEX® magnet available on any model



Model 4006
with lumbo/sacral pad

Covered under US Patents
No. 5,046,488, 5,053,883 and 5,316,022

\$69.95

Sacroiliac Belt

- Non-slip webbing interior
- 3" Woven cotton shell
- Dual closure tension straps



\$39.95

Elastic Back Support Belt



- Hip and rib contour for extra comfort
- Detachable suspenders
- Dual closure tension straps
- Sizes XS - XXL

\$29.95



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Dr. Rob Johnson

Chiropractic is a partnership. Your results and the speed of your recovery are based on what we do on each visit and what you do between visits.

Then, later, when they're feeling better, you might shift gears to:

Dr. Rob Johnson

Chiropractic doesn't benefit from drug advertising, so we depend on you. If you're delighted, please tell others. If you're not, please tell me!

Furthermore, in addition to the high level of deliverability and patient engagement, there are other advantages of a well-designed texting curriculum:

Automation: A patient education curriculum can be designed, set up and run programmatically.

Variable frequency: During a new patient's early care, the frequency can be daily. Later, you can send weekly messages that feature wellness concepts.

Top of mind awareness: Naturally, patients can opt out at any time, but keeping your name or practice name in front of patients improves follow-through, referrals and ultimately, reactivations.

Brevity: Patients are more apt to read your texts because they are short, relevant, and rarely a sales overture.

Inexpensive: For less than the cost of a brochure, you can use technology that is more effective and affordable.

Cutting-edge: By using this omnipresent technology, your patients perceive you as a proactive practitioner who is keeping up with the most contemporary trends in communication.

Powerful and Persuasive

The truth is, chiropractic principles haven't really changed since D. D. Palmer first asked the question "Why do some people get sick, but others do not?" But certainly the environment has changed, and so has the technology we have at our fingertips to communicate our message to patients who think that health comes from the outside in. The key is to adapt with the times. Keep the time-tested principles front and center, but use the latest tools and techniques to communicate these principles powerfully and persuasively.

About The Author: Creative director of Patient Media, Inc., William Esteb has been on the cutting edge of chiropractic patient communication technologies since 1981. Co-founder of the Perfect Patients website service, he has written eleven books exploring the doctor/patient relationship and publishes a weekly email, Monday Morning Motivation. Learn more at www.patientmedia.com