



SOLVING THE PRESCRIPTION PAINKILLER ADDICTION AND DEATH EPIDEMIC WITH CHIROPRACTIC

Alan M. Immerman, D.C., President
Arizona Chiropractic Society (ACS)
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The Director of the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) recently stated in *Phoenix Magazine* (April, 2012) that in 2010 more than 1,100 Arizonans died from prescription drug poisoning, more than the number that die every year from car crashes. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) calls this a “silent epidemic of overprescribing, abuse and misuse. In 2008, prescription drugs killed more than 20,000 people nationwide. Nearly 15,000 of these deaths were caused by painkillers, more than heroin and cocaine combined.

ADHS Director Will Humble stated: “If a thousand people were dying of some infectious disease every year, people would be running in the streets saying, ‘This is ridiculous. Stop this immediately.’ But there’s a thousand people dying of prescription drugs that are left over in their medicine cabinets, and they’re like, ‘Oh well.’”

Yet there is a viable and immediate solution available today to this problem: Chiropractic, non-drug treatment of pain. One of the main types of pain commonly treated with addictive and deadly prescription opiates like Oxycodone, Vicodin and Percocet is low back pain. Yet studies have proven that chiropractic works as well or better at controlling pain with no potential for addiction and death. The North American Spine Society, in a study which reviewed the findings of 699 studies and published its results in the premier medical journal *Spine* in 2010, concluded: “5 to 10 sessions of spinal manipulation administered over 2 to 4 weeks achieves equivalent or superior improvement in pain and function when compared with other commonly used interventions such as medication.” Authors included MDs, PhDs and chiropractors. (Dagenais et al, 2010)

Another very common pain complaint frequently treated with addictive and dangerous painkillers is neck pain even though a 2012 study published in the prestigious *Annals of Internal Medicine* concluded that spinal manipulation was actually more effective in reducing pain than medication for neck pain both in the short and long term. (Bronfort et al, 2012)

The epidemic of addiction and death from painkillers simply does not need to be happening. If neck and back pain patients were treated for pain by chiropractors with spinal manipulation, they would avoid all exposure to addictive opiate painkillers. This fact, along with the scientific studies which have proven that spinal manipulation is equally or more effective at reducing neck and back pain than medications, must cause a shift in current medical practice to stop this deadly epidemic.

All back and neck patients, with few exceptions, should first be seen by a chiropractor to see if their pain can be controlled without medications. If chiropractic care fails, a rare occurrence, then a referral can be made to an MD for medications. The result will be a drastic reduction in the number of prescriptions for addictive pain medications. The number of deaths from such medications will plummet.

Cost is a further positive reason to make this change. A recent study of the Tennessee Blue Cross Blue Shield plan found that when chiropractors were the first contact providers for neck and back pain, overall costs of care were 40% lower than when medical doctors were the first contact providers. When adjusted for severity of condition, the costs were still 20% lower when patients were first seen by chiropractors. (Liliedahl et al, 2010) A previous study from UCLA of a health plan with hundreds of thousands of members found significant cost savings with chiropractic versus medical care of back pain. (Legorreta et al, 2004)

The time has come to do whatever is necessary to change the system so that chiropractors become first contact providers for all patients with back and neck pain. Old prejudices need to be set aside to protect public health. Chiropractic today is a viable, scientifically based solution to much of the prescription drug crisis of addiction and death that we are now experiencing. Public health, welfare and safety will be greatly enhanced as a result. We have no time to lose in making this change. Lives are being lost every day. It must stop now. Arizona chiropractors are ready to step in and do their part to stem this epidemic.

Sincerely,

Alan M. Immerman, D.C.

Alan M. Immerman, D.C., President
Arizona Chiropractic Society

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Arizona Chiropractic Society (ACS)
3515 East Carol Avenue
Phoenix, Arizona 85028
(602) 368-9496
F (866) 567-6762
ACS@AZChiropractors.org
www.AZChiropractors.org
<http://www.shop.azchiropractors.org/>