

American Chiropractic Association

DEDICATED TO IMPROVING THE HEALTH AND WELLNESS OF AMERICA, NATURALLY.

STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN CHIROPRACTIC ASSOCIATION ON THE AMA SCOPE OF PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP

June 9, 2006

The American Chiropractic Association (ACA) takes note of the recent AMA “Scope of Practice Partnership” (SOPP) designed by the AMA and other medical physicians to thwart expansion and otherwise restrict state licensed scope of practices of non-MD health care providers. These actions by organized medicine will only limit access to providers who have the education, expertise and experience to provide safe, quality health care services to the public.

The SOPP is a coalition that the AMA formed to assist various physician organizations facing scope of practice initiatives in the states. The SOPP also plans to fund studies a) determining whether “allied health professionals” truly fill healthcare voids in rural and other underserved areas; and b) examining the education and training of “allied health professionals” with the goal of providing this information as a “point of comparison” to state legislatures.

In a related action, at its November 2005 Interim Meeting, the AMA House of Delegates adopted Resolution 814, titled, “Limited Licensure Health Care Provider Training and Certification Standards.” The resolution states:

RESOLVED, That our American Medical Association, along with the Scope of Practice Partnership and interested Federation¹ partners, study the qualifications, education, academic requirements, licensure, certification, independent governance, ethical standards, disciplinary processes, and peer review of the limited licensure health care providers, and limited independent practitioners, as identified by the Scope of Practice Partnership and report back at the 2006 Annual Meeting.²

Patient Safety

The AMA, through its partnership, claims that standards for care are being lowered and that patients must be protected. The ACA disputes this claim and notes that doctors of chiropractic set the highest standards for patient safety, and numerous studies demonstrate that chiropractors provide safe, high quality care. Neither the SOPP nor Resolution 814 cite any credible evidence that the scopes of practice of doctors of chiropractic are unsafe, problematic, or warrant special scrutiny or study. To the contrary, chiropractors are filling a vital need in this country. With shortages in various areas of healthcare, and more than 45 million uninsured

¹ The “Federation of Medicine” includes the AMA, organizations with voting representation in the AMA’s House of Delegates, and the component societies (e.g., state medical societies) that work with each other to pursue common goals.

² The AMA’s Annual Board of Trustee’s Meeting occurs June 10-14, 2006 in Chicago.

Americans, chiropractors are the solution to this country's healthcare challenges, not the problem. As America's population ages, we are the answer to the challenge of keeping pace with the demand for quality healthcare services. Now is the time to encourage the increased use of all available healthcare professionals, including doctors of chiropractic, to meet the growing demand for affordable, high quality care.

In national surveys, patients favor chiropractic over medical care for back or neck pain. Patients routinely rate Doctors of Chiropractic highly in skill, manner, and explanation of treatment. Patients with chronic low-back pain treated by chiropractors showed greater improvement and satisfaction at one month than patients treated by family physicians. Satisfaction scores were also higher for chiropractic patients. A higher proportion of chiropractic patients (56 percent vs. 13 percent) reported that their low-back pain was better or much better, whereas nearly one-third of medical patients reported their low-back pain was worse or much worse.³

In addition, doctors of chiropractic regularly provide care in hospitals and other multidisciplinary health care facilities. These situations often lead to the best possible care for patients as it provides for a multitude of providers and their expertise to assist the patient.

Physician Status

Chiropractic is the third largest doctoral-level health care profession after medicine and dentistry. Doctors of chiropractic are considered physicians under Medicare and in the overwhelming majority of states.

An individual studying to become a doctor of chiropractic receives an education in both the basic and clinical sciences and in related health subjects. The intention of the basic chiropractic curriculum is to provide an in-depth understanding of the structure and function of the human body in health and disease. The educational program includes training in the basic medical sciences, including anatomy with human dissection, physiology, and biochemistry. Thorough training is also obtained in differential diagnosis, radiology and therapeutic techniques. This means, a doctor of chiropractic can both diagnose and treat patients, which separates them from non-physician status providers.

Education/ Training

Contrary to what the SOPP believes, doctors of chiropractic are well educated and trained in their field. Doctors of Chiropractic undergo at least four years of professional study at one of 18 chiropractic colleges accredited by the Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE), an agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education. In addition, Doctors of Chiropractic must pass national board examinations and become state-licensed prior to practicing.

Chiropractic is the largest, most regulated, and best recognized of the complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) professions.⁴ When it comes to musculoskeletal conditions, in particular, chiropractors are by far the experts and receive the most formal education in this subject -- -- with an education that includes an average of 4,800 hours of in-classroom instruction, laboratory diagnosis and hands-on clinical experience. They also have the most practical, in-office experience -- delivering more than 90 percent of the manipulations reimbursed by health insurance.

History

In the past, doctors of chiropractic have been the targets of a national unlawful boycott by the AMA designed to "contain and eliminate" the chiropractic profession. In 1987, former U.S. District Court Judge Susan Getzendanner ruled that the AMA until 1980 had led a conspiracy to destroy chiropractic medicine. She

³ Nyiendo et al (2000), *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics*

⁴ Meeker, Haldeman; 2002; *Annals of Internal Medicine*

imposed a permanent injunction against the AMA to prevent the group from engaging in a boycott. Following the court order, which the U.S. Supreme Court let stand, the AMA in 1991 revised its policies to make it ethical for medical doctors to refer patients to chiropractors.

With that history in mind, the ACA and state chiropractic associations will vigorously oppose any efforts by the AMA to limit or otherwise restrict the state authorized care provided to patients by licensed doctors of chiropractic.

Conclusion

The ACA calls upon the Scope of Practice Partnership (SOPP) to cease their divisive efforts and, instead, work with the ACA to advance the health and well-being of patients. It is hazardous for the AMA or other medical physician organizations to inappropriately advise consumers, legislators, regulators, or policy makers regarding Doctors of Chiropractic who are dutifully licensed by their state. The erroneous assumption that the SOPP should determine what is best for other licensed healthcare professionals is an outdated line of thinking that does not serve today's patients.



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