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*In Their Best Interest*

The Role of Parents in Making Health  
Care Decisions for their Children

This information provided by ChiroFutures Malpractice Insurance Program



Times have certainly changed from when many of us were kids in terms of how parents make health care decisions. Parents raising children in the 50's through the 70's – even 80's did so in a different culture – one framed by the “Doctor knows best” orthodoxy that permeated the entire culture.

So much of that still exists but it's starting to change with the paradigm shifting in terms of how health care decisions are made. The days of a paternalistic health care system where patients are subservient to (even afraid of) doctors and do exactly what the doctor tells them is being replaced by a Patient Centered Model in which decisions about health care are made in conjunction with the patient's desires and wishes instead of simply relying on the authority of the doctor.

In this more modern patient centered model the role of the doctor is to help the patient make informed decisions through an evidence informed process. The doctor's job in this new health care world is to make sure they (the doctor) is familiar with the research evidence related to the challenges



the patient is facing and to help the patient understand if what is in the scientific literature matches what is happening to the patient. In other words have people like me been studied? Do we know what works for my problem? One of the weaknesses of research is determining whether or not it applies to the patient sitting in front of the doctor.

Once the question of what research exists and whether it applies to my situation has been answered then the next question to consider is whether or not the recommended interventions are consistent with my values as a patient, a mother, a father, a family etc. A particular treatment might exist for a particular patient that has been shown to be effective in the research literature but perhaps the intervention goes against the values held by the patient. The doctor's role in all of this is to help the patient (parents) navigate all this.

Parents struggling with a child who has health challenges are frequently under a great deal of stress. They are worried about their child and they want to do whatever they can to help them. Many times it's very difficult to think clearly about medical decisions when under this kind of stress and pressure. Making matters worse in the case of many childhood health challenges is that the evidence is not always very clear. Especially when it comes to

things that are not considered “mainstream medicine”. On top of that, the child's pediatrician may be antagonistic toward anything not considered mainstream such as so called “alternative” medicine.

How is a parent to decide when doctors disagree?

If we focus on autism and chiropractic as an example, there are currently a total of 39 research studies in the scientific literature showing improved health outcomes in children with autism following

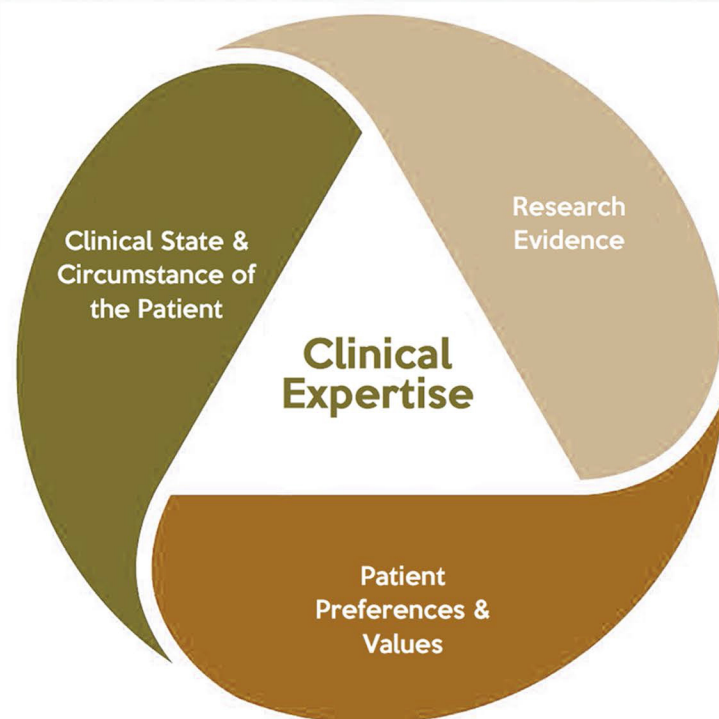
chiropractic care. That sounds great. The problem however, is disagreement amongst researchers, doctors and policymakers about what kind of research should be used to make health care decisions.

Out of those 39 research studies, 26 of them are case studies. Case studies document what happened to a single patient that had a particular health care intervention – in this case chiropractic. There are many people in health care decision making positions who claim one cannot rely on case studies to make health care decisions and that the only way to do that is with what's called a randomized controlled trial or RCT. These types of studies are generally done in drug research and are not really conducive to the types of care provided by practitioners like chiropractors. And the people studied may not be similar to you.

The problem with that line of thinking is that it completely ignores the autonomy of the patient or the parent to make a decision on the evidence that does exist, whether the care is consistent with their values as a family and whether or not the health care provider has seen positive outcomes with other similar cases.

This is where that old paternalistic, doctor knows best mentality rears its ugly head because there are still people and institutions that want to hang onto their control over people's health care decisions. Sometimes they even go so far as to say that what should be done is not what's in the best interest of the patient but what's in the best interest of society as a whole. This could mean subjecting yourself or your child to an intervention even though you don't agree with it or want it but purely because the law or society demands that you do it.

Generally speaking, when weighing decisions about what to do for a health problem one looks at the





efficacy (how well does it work) of the intervention based on the science and the safety of it. Focusing on chiropractic and autism as an example, we know there are 39 research studies that show children with autism undergoing chiropractic care have a number of very positive health outcomes. Much of that research is on the case study level and in an evidence informed process case studies may be bonafide evidence of effectiveness. In terms of safety - the largest studies done on the safety of children undergoing chiropractic show that it is indeed extremely safe.

So if parents of a child with autism are struggling with trying to do everything they can to help their child adapt to the challenges they are facing and they see that there is some evidence that chiropractic has helped others with similar challenges and that chiropractic is safe – then what is the harm in giving chiropractic a try?

Those on the other side of the fence – the detractors – might say the parents are being taken advantage of financially, or fear they are being pressured into trying it.

The bottom line is that ultimately it should be the parent's decision and that decision should come about through an open, patient centered and evidence informed process where the parents make that decision knowledgeable about the evidence, comfortable with the intervention as being consistent with their values and with the help of a health care provider that honors their wishes. This is a truly patient centered, informed consent process that everyone is entitled to.



Reference:  
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---Umscheid CA. Should guidelines incorporate evidence on patient preferences? J Gen Intern Med, August 2009; 24(8):988–990.



# Chiropractic Adjustments Are **SAFE** and **EFFECTIVE** in Children

The days of a paternalistic health care system where patients are subservient to (even afraid of) doctors and do exactly what the doctor tells them is being replaced by a Patient Centered Model in which decisions about health care are made in conjunction with the patient's desires and wishes instead of simply relying on the authority of the doctor.



As with the chiropractic care of adults, an evidence informed perspective respects the needs and wants of parents for the care of their child, the published research evidence and the clinical expertise of chiropractors in the care of children.

ChiroFutures Malpractice Program does not base its malpractice insurance rates on the age of the patients a chiropractor sees. In fact, we are not aware of any actuarial data showing an increase in adverse events from the tens of millions of pediatric chiropractic visits per year.

What chiropractors do is minimally invasive and typically nothing else but their hands are used to gently ease any obstruction to the functioning of the patient's nervous system. Since the nervous system controls and coordinates all functions of the body it is important to be sure it is functioning as best it can with no obstructions and no matter the disease afflicting the patient.

State and provincial laws, federal governments, international, national and state chiropractic organizations and chiropractic educational institutions all support the role and responsibility of chiropractors in the management of children's health. The rationale for chiropractic care of

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children is supported by published protocols that are safe, efficacious, and valid. The scientific literature is sufficiently supportive of the usefulness of these protocols in regard to the chiropractic care of children.

Those contending that there is no evidence supporting the safety and efficacy of the chiropractic care of children demonstrate a complete disregard for the evidence and scientific facts related to the chiropractic care of children.

ChiroFutures encourages and supports a shared decision making process between doctors and patients regarding health needs. As a part of that process, patients have a right to be informed about the state of their health as well as the risks, benefits and alternatives related to care. Any restriction on that dialogue or compelled statements inconsistent with the doctrine of informed consent present a threat to public health.








**ChiroFutures**  
*Risk Purchasing Group*

*Securing the Future - Managing Your Risk  
Chiropractic Malpractice Insurance Program*

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A photograph of a man with a beard and short dark hair, wearing a grey t-shirt, holding a young girl. The girl is wearing a light blue shirt and tan shorts, and is holding a black and white soccer ball. She is smiling and has her legs raised in the air. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with green trees and grass.

The rationale for chiropractic care of children is supported by published protocols that are safe, efficacious, and valid. The scientific literature is supportive of the usefulness of these protocols in regard to the chiropractic care of children.

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