

**ADVICE ON THE RESEARCH BASE FOR THE  
CHIROPRACTIC VERTEBRAL SUBLUXATION COMPLEX**

**1 Introduction**

- 1.1 A member of the public has requested information on the GCC's view on the strength of the research evidence that the chiropractic vertebral subluxation complex is the cause of disease and many health conditions.
- 1.2 Attention was drawn to the fact that programme outcome 4(a) in the current version of the Criteria for Recognition of Degrees in Chiropractic, which requires that students must "*understand the history, theory and principles of chiropractic in a contemporary context*", is accompanied by guidance that includes reference to "*vertebral subluxation-centred models*".

**2 Action to date**

- 2.1 In the first instance, each of the current providers of chiropractic degree programmes recognised by the GCC was asked to provide the following information
- how the chiropractic vertebral subluxation complex (VSC) is covered in the detailed curriculum
  - what relevant research they draw from
- 2.2 The responses to these questions were as follows
- 2.3 Anglo-European College of Chiropractic  
At the AECC the use of the terminology of 'chiropractic vertebral subluxation complex' would occur only within the context of our students reviewing the historical development of chiropractic. Otherwise it does not feature within our curriculum or teaching.

The terminology does not appear within our unit directory for the MChiro programme. It is not being used within the clinical settings in our teaching clinics and we certainly do not teach our students about any causal links to certain health conditions on the basis of this historical concept.

As such we are unable to provide you with any specific relevant or supportive research of high or moderate quality for the 'chiropractic vertebral subluxation complex' from which we draw for our teaching.

2.4 McTimoney College of Chiropractic

The term vertebral subluxation complex occurs in our syllabus on only two occasions:  
in Year 1 with reference to the history and development of the profession  
in Year 3 where various models of chiropractic are discussed in the context of historical and modern practice.

The College does not encourage the use of vertebral subluxation-centred models but rather draws out the problems with this model in the context of other approaches such as the biopsychosocial model.

The College certainly does not teach that the vertebral subluxation complex is the cause of disease as this could not be justified on the clinical evidence.

2.5 Welsh Institute of Chiropractic

To the best of our knowledge, there is currently no relevant high or moderate quality research to support the vertebral subluxation complex (VSC) and its clinical manifestations.

At this institution, we introduce the VSC in an historical context which is important for students to understand how the profession has developed over the years and how and why these belief systems were formulated. We also discuss the VSC in light of the development of rational scientific thinking and contemporary clinical research which underpins a modern health care provider's approach to patient care. The VSC model sits in the periphery and is not included in the manipulative sciences until such time that the research demonstrating its existence is conducted.

2.6 This information was provided to the Education Committee and it was asked to provide advice to Council.

**3 Advice to Council**

3.1 At the meeting of the Education Committee held on 13 April 2010 it was agreed to advise Council as follows.

- The chiropractic vertebral subluxation complex is taught only as an historical concept.
- There is no clinical research base to support the belief that it is the cause of disease or health concerns.

**4 Members' action**

4.1 Members are asked to

- accept the advice of the Education Committee
- agree that GCC guidance should be produced on this matter and that support for compliance with the guidance should be sought from the chiropractic professional associations.