

Mental Health and Chiropractic

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The scope of chiropractic is as broad as the scope of influence of the nervous system. Although many chiropractors and those they serve tend to focus on disorders associated with the physical body, it is obvious that abnormal nervous system function may also affect emotional and physiological health.

According to B.J. Palmer, “D.D. Palmer was the first man to discover that insanity was caused by displaced cervical vertebrae, that by replacing them the patient could be restored to a normal condition.” B.J. also described his expert testimony in a case where he stated, “If an atlas is subluxated it makes abnormal the functions of the brain.” In answer to the question, “What is to be done in insanity?” he admonished his reader to “Go back to the cause. Adjust that and return that brain to its normal capacity and capability.”

Several inpatient mental health facilities were established, where chiropractic adjustments were the dominant clinical service provided. Two of these were located in Davenport. In 1922, the Chiropractic Psychopathic Sanitarium was established. The facility was later known as Forest Park Sanitarium. North Dakota Judge A.W. Ponath noted that at the North Dakota state mental hospital, the “cure and discharge rate” ranged from 18-27%, compared to 65% at Forest Park.

The second facility, Clear View Sanitarium, was established in 1926. In 1951, Clear View was acquired by the Palmer School of Chiropractic. Dr. W. Heath Quigley, who directed the sanitarium, described the clinical protocol: “Each day, each patient was adjusted.” Quigley reported that the rooms were “sunny and bright”, and that the meals included “large servings of fresh vegetables...from a garden.”

Unfortunately, both institutions closed (Forest Park in 1959 and Clear View in 1961) in large measure because of third party pay issues. Insurance companies often refused to pay the costs of care. Iowa statutes at the time did not provide for licensing specialized hospitals; only full service medical hospitals could be licensed. Clear View was not licensed as a hospital, and functioned legally as a nursing home.

The 1970's saw a renewed interest in chiropractic care and mental health issues. In 1973, Dr. Herman S. Schwartz, a chiropractor, published a book titled “Mental Health and Chiropractic: A Multidisciplinary Approach”. In 1949, Dr. Schwartz had published a preliminary report of 350 patients afflicted with a “nervous or mental disorder” and reported that the majority of them showed improvement under chiropractic care. Dr. Schwartz was active in the ACA Council on Mental Health (formerly Council on Psychotherapy), which survived through the 70's, but no longer exists.

In the 1980's, Dr. Quigley published an article describing a four decade period where “treatment of the mentally ill was a highly motivated discipline within the chiropractic profession”. In 1988, Dr. Goff, and Ed.D, published a review of the theory and practice of “chiropractic treatment for mental illness”.

Interest in this field continues. In a previous column, the author reviewed the role of chiropractic care in children with learning and behavioral impairments. Blanks, Schuster, and Dobson published the results of a retrospective assessment on self-related health, wellness and quality of life. This is, to my knowledge, the largest study of it's kind ever undertaken regarding a chiropractic population. After surveying 2,818 respondents in 156 practices, a strong connection was found between persons receiving Network care and self-reported improvement in health, wellness and quality of life.

Genthner et al recently reported on a series of 15 patients with a history of depression. The Beck Depression Inventory II was used to measure the baseline level of depression and any post-care changes following orthospinology care. A paired t-test demonstrated significant improvement in depression test scores.

Nearly 38 years ago, my chiropractor explained that everything we experience is processed through our nervous system. When our perception of the world is distorted by nerve interference, it compromises our ability to respond appropriately. He noted that in addition to damaging our physical health, it could result in impaired physiological and emotional function as well. Finally, he opined that when this happened to a significant number of people in a society, a sick society will result.

In response to my question, “So what do you do?” he answered, “I locate and correct the cause of that interference.” I got goose bumps then, and I'm getting them now. It became obvious at that point that I had to become a chiropractor, and change the world.