

# THE CHIROPRACTIC PROFESSION

# KEY FACTS + FIGURES

Chiropractic is a health care profession that focuses on disorders of the musculoskeletal system and the nervous system, and the effects of these disorders on general health. These disorders include, but are not limited to: back pain, neck pain, pain in the joints of the arms or legs, and headaches. Doctors of Chiropractic (DCs) practice a conservative approach to health care that includes patient examination, diagnosis and treatment. DCs have broad diagnostic skills and are also trained to recommend therapeutic and rehabilitative exercises, as well as to provide nutritional, dietary and lifestyle counseling.

There are **77,000** Doctors of Chiropractic (DCs) in the United States who are required to pass a series of four national board exams<sup>1</sup> and be state licensed.<sup>2</sup> Roughly another **3,000** DCs work in academic and management roles.

There are approximately **10,000** chiropractic students<sup>3</sup> in **18** nationally accredited, chiropractic doctoral graduate education programs<sup>4</sup> across the United States with **2,500** Doctors of Chiropractic entering the workforce every year.<sup>5</sup>

An estimated **40,000** chiropractic assistants (CAs)<sup>6</sup> are in clinical<sup>7</sup> and business management roles for chiropractic practices across the United States.

It is estimated that Doctors of Chiropractic (DCs) treat over **27 million** Americans (adults and children) annually.<sup>8</sup>

Doctors of Chiropractic are educated in nationally accredited, four-year doctoral graduate school programs<sup>9</sup> through a curriculum that includes a minimum of **4,200** hours of classroom, laboratory and clinical internship,<sup>10</sup> with the average DC program equivalent in classroom hours to allopathic (MD) and osteopathic (DO) medical schools.<sup>11</sup>

Doctors of Chiropractic are designated as **physician-level providers** in the vast majority of states and the federal Medicare program. Essential services provided by DCs are also available in federal health delivery systems, including those administered by Medicaid, the U.S. Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense, Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, Federal Workers' Compensation, and all state workers' compensation programs.<sup>12</sup>

## Patient Satisfaction/ Clinical Effectiveness

- Chiropractic outperformed all other back pain treatments, including prescription medication, deep-tissue massage, yoga, pilates, and over-the-counter medication therapies.<sup>13</sup>
- Doctors of Chiropractic are the highest rated healthcare practitioners for low-back pain treatments above physical therapists (PTs), specialist physicians/MDs (i.e., neurosurgeons, neurologists, orthopaedic surgeons), and primary care physicians/MDs (i.e., family or internal medicine).<sup>14</sup>
- With prescription pain drug abuse now classified as an epidemic<sup>15</sup> in the United States and the number of spinal fusions soaring 500% over the last decade,<sup>16</sup> the essential services provided by Doctors of Chiropractic represent a primary care approach for the prevention, diagnosis and conservative management of back pain and spinal disorders that can often enable patients to reduce or avoid the need for these riskier treatments.

## Patient Satisfaction/Clinical Effectiveness (cont'd)

### Conservative Care = Cost Effective

Low back pain care initiated by a medical doctor (MD)



Low back pain care initiated by a doctor of chiropractic (DC)



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Source: Lilledahl et al (2010) JMPT

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- The Doctor of Chiropractic's (DC) collaborative, whole person-centered approach reflects the changing realities of health care delivery, and fits well into Accountable Care Organization (ACO) and patient-centered medical home (PCMH) models bringing greater clinical efficiency, patient satisfaction and cost savings.<sup>17</sup>

- A systematic review in 2010 found that most studies suggest

spinal manipulation achieves equal or superior improvement in pain and function when compared with other commonly used interventions for short, intermediate, and long-term follow-up.<sup>18</sup>

- The American College of Physicians and the American Pain Society jointly recommended in 2007 that clinicians consider spinal manipulation for patients who do not improve with self-care options.<sup>19</sup>

### Likelihood of Surgery For Workers with Back Injuries

First point of contact:  
surgeon/MD

42.7%

First point of contact:  
chiropractic physician/DC

1.5%



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Source: Keeney et al (2012) Spine