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“Chiropractors Don’t Raise Stroke Risk”

I came across an interesting article in the Globe and Mail last Saturday. It read as follows: “a Canadian study indicates there is *no increased risk (of stroke) related to chiropractic treatment* in the heated debate about whether neck adjustments could trigger a rare type of stroke.”

“Researchers say patients are no more likely to suffer a stroke following a visit to a chiropractor than they would after stepping into family doctor’s office. The findings, published in the medical journal “Spine”, help shed light on earlier studies that had cast a cloud on the chiropractic profession and suggested that their actions resulted in some patients suffering a stroke after treatment of their neck.”

““We didn’t see any increased association between chiropractic care and usual family physician care, and the stroke,” said Frank Silver, one of the researchers and also a professor of medicine at the University of Toronto and director of the University Health Network stroke program. “The association occurs because patients tend to seek care when they’re having neck pain or headache, and sometimes they go to a chiropractor, sometimes they go to a physician. But we didn’t see an increased likelihood of them having this type of stroke after seeing a chiropractor.”

“The two neck arteries are susceptible to compression with neck rotation. But it is very rare. It occurs spontaneously, or after minimal neck movements, such as looking backward to reverse a car. Critics charge that the twisting and pulling of the neck frequently done by chiropractors can damage arteries, leading occasionally to stroke.”

“However, a research paper published in 2001 in the Canadian Medical Association Journal found that there is only a one-in-5.85 million risk that a chiropractic neck adjustment will cause a stroke. In this study, the Canadian team looked at nine years of data in Ontario, and found only 818 patients with this kind of stroke. Unlike the previous study in 2001 that investigated the relationship between chiropractic visits and vertebral artery stroke, researchers in this study also studied visits to family doctors that preceded this kind of stroke.”

“Dr. Silver said researchers were looking for an increased association between chiropractic care and stroke. Although they found this (slight) association, *they also discovered it to be the same as when patients visited a family doctor.* The researchers say the association is likely explained by patients seeking medical or chiropractic services for their neck pain rather than these services causing the stroke. *In other words, patients had already damaged the artery before seeking help from either a medical doctor or chiropractor, and then the stroke occurred after the visit!*”

As with any research study, the results have to be interpreted cautiously. By this I mean that it would be wrong to say that a chiropractic treatment has never caused a stroke. However, this study reveals that if it did happen, its not happening at a greater risk than when it is in a medical doctor’s office. Note: the above article was taken from the Jan 19th, 2008, Globe and Mail.