



05/10/2022

To Adjust or Manipulate? Correct a Subluxation or a Segmental Dysfunction...?



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GROUPE DIALOGUE CHIROPATIQUE

- Adjust or manipulate?
- A chiropractic subluxation or a dysfunction of a joint or mobile segment?
- Is it a Subluxation or a Segmental Dysfunction?
- What is the role and importance of traditional language in chiropractic.
- What is the difference between a Chiropractic Subluxation and a Medical Subluxation...
- What are the WHO recommendations for chiropractic terminology?
interesting...
- And you, Doctors, what do you think?

Since the origins of the chiropractic profession, there has always been internal debate and there are still many concerns about the appropriate use of language, terminology in chiropractic practice and education. Several definitions of Chiropractic Subluxation have been proposed, and many even go so far as to recommend that the concept be abandoned because it is difficult to define. If we look at the conclusions of the Commission of Inquiry into Chiropractic in New Zealand, 1979,

[https://www.moh.govt.nz/notebook/nbbooks.nsf/0/3803EA6A471BA01D4C2565D70018760B/\\$file/Chiropractic-in-NZ-report.pdf](https://www.moh.govt.nz/notebook/nbbooks.nsf/0/3803EA6A471BA01D4C2565D70018760B/$file/Chiropractic-in-NZ-report.pdf), it will be noted in this 396-page report that the

Commission devoted an entire chapter to it, Chapter 9, in which we note the following:

- The Commission confirms that the **“concept of vertebral subluxation is central to chiropractic.**
- *It explains the fundamental difference between a "medical subluxation" which is seen as a structural problem and a "chiropractic subluxation" which is essentially a functional problem with neurological involvement, and no more visible on a static x-ray than a claudication, a headache or any other functional problem.*
- The Board accepts that chiropractic subluxation is a valid clinical entity. It also specifies that the Chiropractor is able by his training and his competence to locate and correct this condition which constitutes the chiropractic subluxation.

Since the 1980s, the role of the chiropractic profession, spinal manipulation and other manual therapies have gained momentum, are more recognized and used in national health systems around the world. These changes have generated a lot of interest at the level of the WHO, the World Health Organization. In 2005 the WHO Guidelines on Basic Training

and Safety in Chiropractic were published, which recommended that governments that their health care services should include chiropractic services. It is interesting to look at how the WHO describes Chiropractic and how it defines its various terms.

- A Chiropractic Adjustment can be joint manipulation, mobilization, and all three (3) are forms of spinal manipulative therapy.

- In the Chiropractic definition, the words adjustment and manipulation are interchangeable, paving the way for chiropractors to use more traditional language in the clinic where patients receive their adjustments (internal) and more inclusive language externally.

- The word Subluxation requires an explanatory note, as it conflicts with the medical definition. For the WHO, a chiropractic subluxation means “a segmental lesion or dysfunction”.

In the document published by the WHO in 2005, https://www.wfc.org/website/images/wfc/who_guidelines/who_guidelines_french.pdf, we find the following definitions:

Adjustment:

Any chiropractic procedure using primarily controlled force, pressure, direction, amplitude and velocity, which is applied to joints and adjacent tissues. Chiropractors use these acts to act on joint and neurophysiological function.

Biomechanics:

Study of the structural, functional and mechanical aspects of human movement. It is mainly concerned with external forces of a static or dynamic nature responsible for movement.

Chiropractic:

A health profession concerned with the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disorders of the neuromusculoskeletal system, as well as the effects of these disorders on general health. Emphasis is placed on manual techniques, including adjustment and/or joint manipulation, and especially on subluxations.

Fixation:

A condition in which a joint has become fully or partially immobilized in a certain position, which limits physiological movement.

Impulse :

Sudden manual application of controlled directional force to the affected part of the patient's body to effect an adjustment.

Joint manipulation: Manual procedure by which, by means of a directed impulse, a joint is moved beyond its physiological limits of movement without however exceeding its anatomical limits.

Spinal manipulative therapies:

All procedures where the hands or a mechanical device are used to move, adjust, manipulate, stretch, massage, stimulate or otherwise act on the spine and paravertebral muscles to improve the health of the patient.

Joint mobilization:

Manual procedure without impulse during which the joint does not exceed its physiological limits of movement.

Neuromusculoskeletal:

Relating to the musculoskeletal system and the nervous system with respect to disorders that manifest in these two systems, including disorders of a biomechanical or functional nature.

Palpation:

1) The action of feeling with the hands. 2) Variable manual pressure applied to the surface of the body to assess the shape, size, consistency, position, inherent motility and health of the underlying tissues.

Posture:

1) Position of the body. 2) Relative arrangement of body parts. Good posture is the state of muscular and skeletal balance that

protects the supporting structures of the body from progressive injury or deformity regardless of the position (standing, lying, squatting, bending) in which these structures function or are at rest.

Subluxation*:

Lesion or dysfunction of a joint or an intervertebral segment whose alignment, movement integrity and/or physiological function are altered although the contact between the surfaces of the joint is intact. It is essentially a functional entity that can influence biomechanical and neurological integrity.

Subluxation complex (vertebral):

Theoretical model and description of joint segment dysfunction that takes into account the interaction of pathological changes in nervous, muscular, ligamentous, vascular and connective tissues.

*** Subluxation:**

This definition is specific to chiropractic. For conventional medicine, subluxation is a significant structural displacement that can be detected by static visualization.

Here is an important question raised by David Chapman-Smith:
“Can we imagine that there will always be heated discussions about the use of traditional language in chiropractic?
Considering human nature and the frequent arguments about

language in life in general, one would think so... There is no reason why a Doctor of Chiropractic should not continue to adjust and correct subluxations in his clinic, or if they prefer, use spinal manipulation to treat segmental dysfunction. The use of the two terminologies makes sense, with an internal and external nuance. Not simple, but realistic...”

For my part, I am a fervent promoter of the use of a vocabulary or a language specific to the chiropractic profession and I always take the time in my communications to explain the terms that I used.

Here again, many will say that in the office, in the clinic, their patients still receive their adjustments, but in reporting to third-party payers or other healthcare professionals, this can be described as manipulation if it can facilitate communication. But for many others, like me, the continued use of the traditional language of the profession is a matter of fundamental principle and is deeply connected to the love of my profession, its practice and its identity. This is not at all a whim related to semantics. This is, in my view, very important so that we can establish and preserve a specific and particular identity as a health profession. The words we use are extremely important in describing and explaining WHO we are and WHY what we do is special and unique.

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29.09.2022

Note :

A text inspired from these sources:

1. The Chiropractic Report, May 2015, Vol.29 No.3.

Editor: David Chapman-Smith, LL.B. (Hons.).

2. WHO Guidelines for Basic Education and Safety in Chiropractic, 2005

3. CHIROPRACTIC IN NEW ZEALAND REPORT OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY, 1979.

4."The Contemporary Understanding of the Chiropractic Subluxation", by Dr. Heidi Haavik, published in the book "Pediatric Chiropractic", by Claudia A. Anrig and Gregory Plaughter. Third Edition, 2022.